SHORT STORIES

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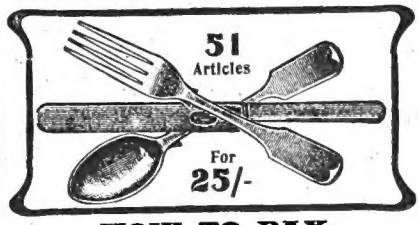

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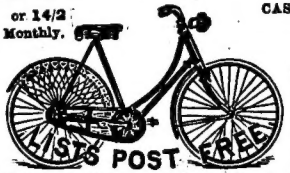

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SHORT STORIES

No. 712.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 23rd, 1902.

A NOVEL ENGAGEMENT.

Telling of a Girl, Two Men, and Two Pictures.

"WHICH do you think she will choose, Jack?"

Dick Halston turned from the two oil paintings as he spoke and looked inquiringly at his friend.

The latter raised his eyebrows and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Honestly, I never thought she would agree to our proposal," went on the first speaker, nervously.

Jack Steadman laughed.

"A woman's love of novelty, Dick."

A few moments passed in unbroken silence, then Halston spoke again.

"Hang it all!" he burst out. "I can't stand this suspense! It is only half-past two, and she won't be here until after four. I'll tell you what, Jack, I am going to run down to Richmond. This waiting is making me as nervous as a woman. I shall make a fool of myself if she chooses your painting. You don't mind?"

"No."

But the word was reluctantly spoken. However, Halston did not notice it. He caught up his hat.

"Good-bye, old chap. And you will let me know as soon as possible? If she chooses your painting, just wire the one word, 'mine,' and if the luck is with me wire, 'yours,' I shall understand it."

He wrung his friend's hand.

"Good luck to you, Jack—although that means the reverse to me, doesn't it?"

The door slammed behind him, and Steadman heard him bound down the steep stairs two steps at a time. He gave a low whistle, heaved a sigh, and then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he fell into profound thought.

The two artists had long loved the same girl and she could not choose between them. The state of affairs between the trio grew from bad to worse, until there came a day when the two friends said that it was unendurable, that she was ruining their careers, and they implored her to consent to a plan which they proposed. Their proposal was that they should each paint her portrait from memory. No names were to be affixed to the pictures, and when they were finished she was to choose between them. The artist whose painting she chose was to be her husband. The girl demurred for a while, but in the end she gave her consent.

* * * * *

"I wish he had not gone," muttered Steadman. "It's awfully hard waiting here alone."

He rose and paced the length of the studio several times, coming at last to a standstill before the two pictures.

From the canvases a girl's lovely face looked out. In the actual painting there was little, if anything, to choose between them; yet, in looking at the one, you involuntarily waited for the girl to speak; in the other, you expected no such thing.

"How on earth did Dick get the soul into his?" exclaimed Steadman savagely. "It is splendid," he muttered. "Splendid!"

He turned abruptly, and fell to pacing the studio again. The girl's eyes seemed to follow him with a half mischievous expression, while the lips, half tender, half scornful, seemed to smile at his discomfiture. He threw himself into a chair with his back to the pictures. But soon, as if against his will, he had moved the chair so as to face them again.

"Why doesn't she come?" he cried fiercely, starting to his feet.

Then a demon rose up within him and whispered:

"What if she chooses his? You know it is the better. Look at that rose she holds so carelessly in her fingers; can you not fancy that you smell its fragrance? Don't you expect her to step out of the canvas and speak to you?"

Steadman drew his hand across his brow.

"No one would be the wiser," the voice went on. "Dick would go abroad at once. You know he swore he would. Then something could happen to the paintings—a fire—they would be destroyed. Better pluck the flower that he has run away from! He was not man enough to see the game out. Treachery?—Nonsense! They would never suit each other, but you—you could, you would make her happy. You feel that with her at your side you could do great things——"

He rushed across the studio to the paintings standing side by side.

"I must have you," he cried. "Ethel!" And the lovely eyes looked back at him, mischievously, alluringly.

* * * * *

There came a ring from below, followed by the light tread of dainty feet ascending the stairs.

Jack Steadman pulled himself together with a guilty start, and hurriedly drew a curtain before the two pictures. Then he went to welcome the anxiously awaited visitors.

"Oh, Dick has bolted," he said, with a somewhat forced laugh, in answer to Ethel's glance of inquiry round the studio.

"Bolted?"

There was surprise, anger and consternation in the girl's voice.

"There was scarcely necessity for that," she remarked coldly.

"You misunderstand me," interrupted Steadman. "Dick has only run down to Richmond until after your decision."

"Poor Dick!" murmured Ethel to herself.

"Indeed," she said aloud, with a contemptuous little pout.

Her good humour returned, and she chatted gaily.

"Now," said Jack Steadman, going over to the easels and

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laying his hand on the curtain, will you choose between these two pictures? Ethel," he said, turning to her aunt, but looking at the girl, "has promised to marry the man whose portrait of herself she chooses."

The old lady bowed, and Ethel murmured an inaudible assent.

Steadman drew aside the curtain with a hand that shook, despite his utmost endeavours.

A simultaneous burst of admiration broke from both ladies.

"They are beautiful," cried the elder lady. "Look at that one, Ethel! My dear child, it is a living likeness of your own sweet self."

And Steadman's face grew grey, for she pointed to Halston's picture.

"Far too beautiful for me, auntie," whispered the girl, for once abashed.

But Steadman, looking at her, thought bitterly that it was not lovely enough, and his breath came short as the shadowy thoughts of a few moments since took shape.

"Which do you choose?" he asked her in a curious, hard voice.

There was a moment of awful suspense, then Ethel answered low and hesitatingly:

"I ought to choose that one," pointing to the unhappy artist's own painting, "for it is less beautiful, and, therefore, must be more like me. But, oh!" with sudden rapture. "I cannot help but choose this! It is lovely!"

"Lovely!" chimed in her aunt. "And look at that rose, dear! Have you ever seen anything so exquisitely painted?"

"It is like the one I gave Dick the other night," faltered the girl.

There was a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes.

"Yes, it is the same," said Steadman quietly, "I begged it of Dick to put in my picture. It's colour was so perfect."

"Your picture?"

There was a note of despair in the girl's voice.

"Yes; mine."

Had either lady looked they would have observed the ghastly pallor of Steadman's face and the tense set of his mouth.

But the old lady was still lost in admiration of the painting, and Ethel had turned aside to hide the sudden clouding of her eyes.

"Come, Ethel, we must be going," said her aunt, and she shook hands warmly with Steadman, saying: "I congratulate you heartily on your great success and also on winning so sweet a wife. And you, Ethel, are a fortunate girl to have won so gifted a husband!"

Age had dulled her eyes. She did not notice that anything was amiss with the girl, and neither of them noticed the man.

"Good-bye, Ethel!"

There was an exultant gleam in his eyes. Mechanically the girl held out her hand to her future husband. Her lips moved, but no sound escaped them, and with a slight inclination of her head, she followed her aunt.

* * * * *

"A telegram, sir."

"Thanks."

For a moment, Dick Halston held the flimsy envelope in his fingers, turning it this way and that, dreading to open it.

"What a coward I am!" he muttered, and with a sudden resolution he tore it open.

At first he was only able to grasp the one word: "Yours." Then he read further:

"Come to the studio at once. Important."

* * * * * *

"Jack, old man! Jack, where are you? Where are you?"

It was Halston's voice calling, as he looked round the empty studio. But he received no answer. Then his eyes fell upon a letter addressed to himself in Steadman's handwriting. He opened it, wondering what it meant.

"Dick," he read, "forgive me! The temptation was too great and I fell. I claimed your picture as mine. Your love for her will make you understand. But, thank Heaven! I repented before it was too late. Good-bye, and forgive me if you can. "JACK STEADMAN."

* * * * *

And Dick Halston did understand.

Arthur Hales.

KITTY'S SISTER.

A Pathetic Love Story.

WHEN Katherine Graham learnt that Winifred, her elder sister, had fallen in love with Robert Maitland, her first feeling was one of anger and indignation.

She would have felt angry and indignant whoever had been the object of Winifred's affections, but the idea of Robert Maitland was particularly distasteful.

Katherine had only met Robert once, and on that occasion had taken a violent, and, as Winifred insisted, quite unreasonable dislike to him.

"When you know him better, you'll be sorry you wronged him," said Winifred, with tears of mortification in her eyes.

"I don't want to know him better," replied her sister, shortly.

"But, Kitty, you'll have to *now*," protested Winifred.

To this Katherine made no immediate reply.

"How long have you been engaged to him?" she demanded, suddenly.

"Why, Kitty, only since to-day, of course! As if I shouldn't have told you at once."

"Oh, I didn't know. You've been in love with him longer than that, haven't you, and never told me?"

Winifred began to laugh through her tears.

"So that's why you're so cross!" she exclaimed. "You don't like my having had a secret from you. Darling, I couldn't help it. I hadn't the courage to confess till I was certain *he* cared for me, *too*. Besides, you were away, and it's so hard to tell that sort of thing in writing."

"You might have told *me*," cried Katherine, "but you never even allowed me to suspect. It was horrid of you. I shall never forgive you, and—and I hate Mr. Robert Maitland."

"Kitty, you don't know what you're saying!" remonstrated her sister patiently.

She was so patient because she had begun to realise the situation.

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Katherine's outburst did not annoy her. In fact, if the truth be told, it pleased her not a little.

"Kitty's jealous," she reflected. And the thought that her sister was so fond of her as to be jealous of Robert made her forgive the unkind things Katherine said of him.

"Try and be nice to him for my sake, even if you do hate him," she pleaded.

But Katherine would promise nothing, and when, that same evening, Robert Maitland called to see them, she was so cold and repellant in her manner to him, that poor Robert thought he had never met a more unpleasant girl, and wondered how it was possible that two sisters could be so utterly unlike.

"She seems to lack everything that my Winnie has got," thought Robert. And few people, seeing the two sisters together, would have contradicted him.

Winifred Graham was by way of being a beauty, tall and exquisitely proportioned, the possessor of a perfect profile, limpid, childlike blue eyes, and hair the colour of ripened corn—as Robert, with pardonable lack of originality, was wont to describe it. Hers was a fair, sweet, lovable face, but not a clever one—decidedly not a clever one, said Winifred's detractors.

Some even went so far as to declare that they were bored by beauty without brains, and that Katherine's homely countenance was infinitely more attractive than her sister's.

It was usually ladies who made those remarks—ladies whose husbands and brothers did not share their opinion.

Katherine was not popular among men, not so much because of her want of beauty as because she had a way of saying cynical things which they considered a masculine prerogative.

"I wonder what her redeeming features are?" thought Robert, watching the girl curiously, as she sat, silent and sullen, in the remotest corner of the room, idly turning over the leaves of a book on her lap. "They say everybody has got some redeeming features, but, really, hers are not very obvious."

Perhaps it was just because Katherine's redeeming features were so very far from obvious that Robert felt a certain interest in their discovery. Besides, the girl was Winnie's sister, and Robert was prepared to do much for Winnie's sake.

He was not a fool, and he understood women better than most men.

It did not take Katherine long to discover that Robert Maitland was a man it was impossible to treat with that frigid politeness which was the attitude she had made up her mind to adopt towards her future brother-in-law.

Robert, apparently, was impervious to snubs, for the simple reason that he did not understand them. He ignored the most pointed rebuffs, and reduced Katherine to a state of indignant impotence by his calm and unruffled amiability.

He devoted himself to her so assiduously that Winifred laughingly whispered to him that she was getting jealous, and when at last he took his leave and Katherine held out two fingers, he bent forward and planted a brotherly kiss upon her cheeks as coolly and naturally as though he had been in the habit of thus saluting her for years!

Winifred laughed at Katherine's scarlet face, but Robert himself seemed quite unconscious of having done anything unusual.

"Oh, I was almost forgetting to ask you," he said, turning back in the doorway. "I got a box at the Lyceum for to-morrow night on the chance of your both being able to come."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Winifred. "Of course we'll come."

"I'm afraid I shall not be able to go, thank you," said Katherine stiffly.

"Kitty! Why not?" asked her sister.

"I don't think the servants should be left alone."

"The idea! Why, they've been left alone dozens of times!" cried Winnie.

"And I absolutely refuse to take 'No' for an answer," put in Robert.

"If you stay at home, Kitty, Bob and I shall insist on keeping you company," said Winifred.

"Then it's settled," declared Robert, firmly. "I'll call for you at half-past seven. Good-night and pleasant dreams."

Before Katherine could think of a suitable reply, he was gone.

"Isn't he an old darling?" said Winifred. "Kitty, you and I are going to have a lovely time!"

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Katherine, with an angry flush. "*I* shall not have a good time."

"Oh, Kitty, he's promised to take us *everywhere!*"

"He can take you. He certainly isn't going to take me."

"But you're coming to-morrow. You've promised, you know!"

"Did I promise?" asked Katherine uneasily.

"Of course."

"We haven't asked father whether we can go."

"As if that mattered! Of course he'll say yes. He always does."

This was true enough. Mr. Graham, a widower of five years' standing, troubled his head too little about his daughters to deny them anything. Wrapt up entirely in his business, he adopted the comfortable policy of ignorance in all domestic matters. Having satisfied himself that Winifred's suitor was desirable from a worldly point of view, he gave his sanction to the engagement, and there considered his responsibilities at an end.

He never shared in, and never interfered with, his daughters' plans. To him, paternal duties meant little more than the paying of dressmakers' bills, and, to do him justice, he did this cheerfully, and with unfailing regularity.

"Bob wanted to know whether we cared for the Opera," Winifred went on. "I told him we were dying to go, so he's going to get seats for the earliest possible date. Won't it be lovely?"

"Look here, Winnie," said Katherine gravely, "I am going with you to-morrow because there seems no help for it now, but that's the first and the last time I mean to inflict myself upon you two. You can reassure Mr. Maitland upon that point."

"Don't be horrid, Kitty! As if we always wanted to be by ourselves! And don't, *don't* call him Mr. Maitland, *please*. Just as if he were a stranger."

"He *is* a stranger to me," declared Katherine obstinately. "You forget, this is only the second time I've seen him."

"He couldn't help your being away when he got to know me," said Winifred. "And you must admit that he's doing his best to make up for lost time," she added, with a sly smile.

And Katherine, remembering that brotherly kiss, blushed but said nothing more.

On the following evening Katherine was forced to admit that if Robert Maitland had not committed the heinous crime of falling in love with her sister, she, Katherine, might possibly have learnt to tolerate him. As it was—well, he was really quite a pleasant person, but she could never forgive him, never.

By slow—by very slow—degrees, the girl's frigid politeness to Robert gave way to more cordial behaviour, until at last, almost in spite of herself, Katherine found herself on quite a friendly footing with her prospective brother-in-law, and one day she astonished that gentleman by remarking suddenly when they happened to be alone together—

"I want to apologise to you—Robert."

She had never brought herself to address him by his Christian name before.

"Apologise—to me?" asked Robert, in genuine amazement.

"Why do you look so surprised?" demanded the girl, and her grey eyes looked straight into his own. "You know that I have reason to apologise. I've behaved abominably. I daresay you hate me."

"Hate you—Winnie's sister? How can you think that?"

"Of course, for Winnie's sake, you put up with me," said Katherine, and something flashed up in the grey eyes. "If I were not her sister, I suppose you would think me detestable?"

"No," said Robert simply, and took her hand.

She withdrew it hastily.

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"I'm going to be quite frank," she said, with a flush on her face. "I don't see how we two can ever be really friends. When I heard that Winnie had promised to be your wife, I hated you as I'd never hated anyone before. Winnie is the only person in the world I love, and—and—I believe you understand."

"Yes—I understand," he replied softly.

"I—I'm beginning to see how selfish and unreasonable I am," Katherine went on, speaking with difficulty. "I despise myself. I try not to feel as I do, and yet I—I can't help being jealous of you still, and I think I—I shall hate you a little," she ended, with a laugh that was almost a sob.

"I understand," said Robert again.

"And yet, how should you understand it *really?*" asked Katherine, almost piteously. "You have so many friends. You are good-looking, and successful, and popular. Everybody likes you, Winnie says. But I'm ugly, and disagreeable, and insignificant. Nobody cares for me. Winnie's love was all I had."

Robert seized her hand, and this time the girl allowed it to remain in his.

"Foolish little girl," he said. "You think I've taken Winnie's love away from you? Isn't it just possible that in her heart there's room for both of us? Isn't it possible even, that she may care for you all the more now?"

Katherine shook her head.

"Do you know," continued Robert, "I never realised that I cared much for my own sister till I met Winnie. One love doesn't necessarily drive away another. Kitty, I don't see why we shouldn't be friends!"

"After I've told you I hated you?"

"Oh," said Robert cheerfully, "that was when you still thought you had reason to hate me. Now you know better."

"Do I?"

"You see, we're not really rivals. We can flourish quite happily side by side. If you don't mind Winnie loving me, I shan't mind her loving you. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Anyway, it's making the best of things, and one should always do that."

"Yes," returned Katherine thoughtfully, "only it's generally so much easier to make the worst of them. *I* began by making the worst of you."

"Did I seem so very horrible?"

"Well—yes."

"Oh!"

Katherine began to laugh at Robert's discomfiture.

"You asked, you know, and I couldn't tell a story, could I? Besides—I've changed my mind!"

"Sensible person!" said Robert, giving her a hearty kiss.

The blood leapt to Katherine's cheeks. Somehow, it always did when Robert kissed her.

Winnie, entering the room at that moment, looked from one to the other in some alarm.

"You two haven't been quarrelling, have you?" she asked.

Robert laughed.

"On the contrary," he said, "Kitty and I have never got on better. We've come to the conclusion, Winnie, that we like each other very much."

Winifred looked doubtful.

"Is this true?" she inquired suspiciously.

"My darling, your scepticism is not very complimentary to either of us," remarked Robert. "Of course it's true."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Winifred, with a little sigh of pleasure. "Then you're coming with us to-morrow after all, Kitty?"

"Not I."

"But why not?"

"Because," said Katherine, smiling.

"Oh, I know what you mean," cried Winnie. "But you're all wrong. Bob and I would simply bore each other to death if we went alone, wouldn't we, Bob?"

"Of course," assented Bob, a trifle feebly.

"Well, you'll have to risk that," said Katherine, "because I can't possibly go with you to-morrow."

"Why won't you come?" asked Robert.

"Business," replied Katherine mysteriously, and would say nothing more.

"They would rather be alone," she reflected, with a pang to which she would not have confessed. "They don't want me always with them. If I were in Winnie's place, I shouldn't——"

She stopped suddenly, and cast a startled glance at Robert.

"What's the matter, Kitty? Why do you look so frightened?" asked her sister.

"Do I look frightened? I was only thinking of something."

"Something dreadful, of course," said Winnie. "Kitty's always thinking of dreadful things," she added, turning to Robert.

The latter gave Katherine a searching look. There was a curious expression upon her face, he thought; something that attracted him, yet made him feel vaguely uneasy.

From that day Robert began to take a new interest in his sweetheart's sister. The girl puzzled him, but, mingled with his perplexity, there grew up a certain subtle sympathy with her, the reason for which he understood but dimly.

Perhaps it was Katherine's lack of beauty that appealed to him, and roused his chivalrous instincts. To him there was something pathetic in the contrast between the two sisters.

Nature had been so niggardly to poor Katherine. As Robert compared his sweetheart's fair, flower-like face with Katherine's plain, uncompromising beauty, his heart warmed with a strange tenderness towards the pale-faced girl to whom so little had been given.

By-and-bye, however, it began to dawn upon Robert that Nature had been a little less unjust to Katherine than he had imagined. He discovered what Winnie's detractors had discovered long ago, that Winnie's beauty and Katherine's brains were in the same proportion.

It would be hard to say at what precise moment he realised the fact that Winnie was *not* a clever girl. When the thought did come to him in definite shape, Robert felt, first startled, then angry and indignant with himself, for it seemed like disloyalty to the girl he loved.

"I hate intellectual women," he told himself, with an air of defiance that belied the truth of his assertion. "So long as they're good, and sweet, and lovable, like my Winifred, what more can a man want?"

In his heart of hearts Robert knew that there *was* something more—something that Winifred could never give him.

Robert was ambitious. Though possessed of an independent income ample for his needs, he did not live in idleness. He had devoted himself eagerly, at a very youthful age, to the study of philosophy, and had already written several works on philosophical subjects.

His writings and lectures were beginning to be talked about at the time when Winifred Graham came into his life.

Robert had never met anyone quite like Winifred. She belonged to a type that was almost unknown to the young student. She was so fair, and fresh, and simple, so unlike the bluestockings to whose society he was accustomed. Her very ignorance fascinated him.

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A woman who had never heard of Kant and Schopenhauer! A woman who prattled charmingly of theatres, and concerts, and river picnics, of the latest song and the latest creation from Paris, a woman who never read anything more intellectual than a novel by Marie Corelli!

Winifred was a new sensation, a new delight to Robert. To him she seemed an embodiment of pure joy of living, of all that is bright, and fair, and innocent in life, and he succumbed without a struggle to the charm of her girlish presence.

Then, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, what had attracted Robert so strongly to Winifred began to assume a different aspect, and presently he realised that the girl's light-hearted gaiety and careless enjoyment went hand-in-hand with a certain complete and, to Robert, astounding incapacity to appreciate the more serious issues of life.

At first Robert had attributed Winifred's want of interest in his own particular hopes and aspirations to simple ignorance. It should be his privilege to initiate his sweetheart into the mysteries of his beloved study.

He never regretted for a moment that Winnie was no blue-stocking, and he had no wish to make her one.

All he hoped for was that she might gradually come to understand and sympathise with the object of his labours, his strivings after truth, and reason, and the justification of things that from time immemorial have baffled philosophers and simple men alike.

But when Robert began to speak to her in this strain, Winifred opened her blue eyes very wide and stared at her lover in unaffected bewilderment.

"I know nothing about these things," she said simply, and began talking to him about the latest extravagance of the latest society actress.

Once or twice, Robert returned to the charge. Winifred became first perplexed and troubled, then reproachful, and even a little petulant. Robert, in his philosophical mood, alarmed and irritated her. She resented what she could not understand.

Those unknown, unexplored regions which her lover tried to open out before her, did not attract her. She had no curiosity, no desire to learn. Robert's learning worried her a little. It seemed to awaken a dim consciousness of her own limitations.

"I wish, I do wish, you were just an ordinary young man," she said to him, one day, after he had been engaged in a futile attempt to arouse her interest in certain extracts from a book of Professor Huxley's. "Robert, I sometimes think I ought not to marry you."

"Sweetheart," cried Robert, full of tender reproach. "What makes you say that?"

"I'm not clever enough for you, Robert. It's a pity you fell in love with me."

Robert laughed uneasily.

"Nonsense, darling," he said, "I'm the happiest man in the world, and I've no right to trouble your pretty head with things that can't interest you. I'm afraid I'm an old fogey by nature, but you'll have to teach me not to be one."

And he bent down and kissed away the wistful look that had crept into Winnie's charming face.

"You're quite sure you wouldn't rather marry somebody clever—somebody like Kitty, for instance?"

Robert started, and a deep flush suffused his dark face.

"What put that idea into your head, sweetheart?" he asked. With a sudden fierce movement, he took the girl in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

That was the last time Robert ever attempted to inspire Winifred with enthusiasm for his work. From that moment he never referred to it in her presence. He tried, with an earnestness that was almost pathetic, to keep within the narrow circle of his sweetheart's own innocent girlish interests, and he succeeded so well that Winifred's vague doubts were set at rest.

It was only to Winifred's sister that Robert spoke of his work now.

Not that Katherine had any greater pretensions to learning than Winnie. She was as frankly ignorant of the teachings of the great philosophers as Winnie herself, only there was this vast difference between them: That whereas Winnie was bored and miserable in the presence of superior knowledge, Katherine was fascinated by it, and impelled with the desire to make it her own.

Before long Robert had cause to marvel at the younger sister's keen intelligence, at the quickness of her perceptions, the ease with which she mastered ideas that were entirely new to her.

Katherine never did things by halves.

"It's to be friends," she had told Robert. And friends they became in more than merely name.

The girl never obtruded her presence on the lovers. She had an exaggerated horror of being "in the way," a feeling against which her sister was wont to protest with honest indignation.

But in spite of this morbid sensitiveness on her part, Katherine and Robert were thrown a good deal together, and the girl's ready sympathy, her genuine interest in Robert's work, was inexpressibly grateful to him.

Then it happened that Winifred received a letter from an aunt, an unmarried sister of her father's, inviting the girl to stay with her for a few weeks at her home in Edinburgh.

It was barely two months before the date fixed for the wedding, and Winifred was very loth to go.

"I can't understand aunt Kate inviting me now," she said to Katherine. "She must know how busy I am, and—and all that sort of thing."

"Perhaps father will let you decline the invitation," suggested her sister.

But Mr. Graham would not hear of this. It was one of those rare occasions on which he thought fit to exert his paternal authority.

"I have so much to do," pleaded Winifred.

"That's precisely why your aunt has invited you," said Mr. Graham, who knew his sister. "She wants to put you to the test. Remember, you are her favourite niece, Winifred. I can't allow you to ruin your chances. If you offend her now, she'll never forgive you."

Mr. Graham could be firm where his daughters' worldly prospects were concerned, and so to Edinburgh Winnie had to go, much to her own and Katherine's indignation.

Winifred's attempt at cheerfulness as she bade good-bye to Robert and Katherine at Euston was almost pathetic.

"You two are not to mope while I'm away, do you hear?" she said, furtively wiping away a tiny tear. "You're to go and see Kitty every day, Robert," she added, turning to her sweetheart with a pretty air of authority. "Kitty's promised to be so good to you that you won't miss me a bit."

Robert went home that night with Winifred's parting words ringing in his ears.

"I'm to see her every day," he said with a bitter smile that would have puzzled Winifred could she have seen it.

Robert kept his promise.

Katherine told him laughingly that she had no need of him. Her hands were full with preparations for Winnie's wedding.

"Now that Winnie's away I have to do double duty," she said. "You've no idea what a lot there is to be done. I don't know how I'm going to finish it all!"

"Can't the servants do it?" asked Robert.

"Now, isn't

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that just like a man?" cried Katherine. "Fancy leaving Winnie's *trousseau* to the mercy of the servants! Robert, your ignorance is appalling. You don't deserve to be married!"

"I know that," said Robert, so seriously that the girl looked at him in surprise.

"I was only joking, of course," she remarked.

"Perhaps it was one of those true words spoken in jest."

For some reason Katherine chose to treat the reply with flippancy.

"What a dreadful mood to be in!" she exclaimed. "The idea of cultivating a conscience on the eve of your wedding!"

"There's plenty of time."

"Plenty of time! And Winnie with not a thing to wear!"

"I meant there's time for—repentance."

"Robert, you're quite unbearable this evening, and I don't understand in the least what you mean," said Katherine, angrily.

"Katherine—what would you say if I told you that it was impossible for me to—to marry Winifred?"

The girl turned white to the lips. Her grey eyes—the only beauty that Nature had given her—flashed ominously. With an effort she controlled herself.

"I should say," she replied, in a voice that trembled a little, "I should say that was the poorest joke I ever had heard."

For a moment Robert was silent. His own face was almost as pale as his companion's.

"Forgive me," he said, at last. "I spoke like a fool. I'm sorry I distressed you. Forgive me, dear."

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Perhaps I ought to have taken the jest in better part," she said, "but just for a moment, I believed—I believed it was not a jest, Robert, and—you frightened me. That you had deceived Winnie—my Winnie—who loves you so—it was too horrible. Oh, Robert, if you should ever be unkind to her—if you should ever forget that she loves you——"

The girl broke off suddenly, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into a passion of sobs.

And Robert, calling himself brute and blackguard, stood by, powerless to comfort her.

He could not understand the violence of Katherine's grief. At that moment it was well he did not understand.

Presently the sobs ceased, and Katherine lifted a pitiful face to Robert.

"What a weak, hysterical creature you must think me," she said, with a smile that moved him strangely. "After my promise to Winnie, too! A nice cheerful substitute she's chosen for herself. Don't be angry with me, Robert. I promise not to be so foolish again."

And Katherine was as good as her word. She had never seemed brighter and happier and more light-hearted than in the days that followed.

Robert, on the other hand, was moody and depressed. A great change seemed to have come over him since Winifred's departure—a change that almost frightened Katherine.

The girl tried to attribute his strange conduct to Winnie's absence.

"It's only natural that he should be silent and depressed," she reasoned. "He's pining for her. He can't bear to be away from her so long."

And yet, though she dared not admit it even to herself, she knew that this was not the truth. The truth she had read in his eyes that night when he asked her the question she had chosen to interpret as a foolish jest. The truth she dared not face.

Then, suddenly, without warning, she was called upon to face it.

One morning Robert came to her with a letter in his hand.

"In less than a week she'll be home again," he said.

"I know," replied the girl brightly. "I've had a letter, too. Robert, I'm very glad."

"I'm glad, too," said Robert. But there was no joy in his face.

Katherine answered nothing. She understood too well.

"Kitty, I shall not see you again till Winifred comes back."

The girl gave him a startled look.

"Why, there are five whole days, and we have seen each other every day till now," she said.

"Kitty, I can't come again," he cried. "I daren't come again—till she is back!"

The girl began to tremble. Slowly, almost reluctantly, she raised her eyes to his. For a moment they gazed at each other as though spell-bound. And in that moment there was revealed to each something that could never be recalled.

With a cry he came towards her. The girl shivered and put out her arms as though to repel him.

"Kitty," he whispered, "Kitty, is it too late?"

His words seemed to break the spell that held her. Almost fiercely she shook off the hand he had laid on her arm.

"Robert, are you mad?" she cried.

The sound of her voice softened him. With an effort that was almost physical pain to him, he controlled himself.

"Forgive me," he said, humbly. "I did not mean to frighten you, but—yes, I *was* mad for a moment, I had forgotten."

"Go," she said in a low voice, not daring to look at him.

He seized her hand and kissed it.

"Good-bye—little sister," he said, softly. And stole from the room.

Grete Hahn.

THIS WEEK'S COMPETITION.

For this week's competition I want my readers to make a sentence of seven words, the initial letters of the words to be C, Y, N, T, H, I, A, respectively. A Solid Silver Pencil-case will be awarded to the sender of the best sentence, and ten consolation gifts, consisting of rolled gold hearts and charms will go to the senders of the ten next best. Sentences should be written on the backs of postcards only, and should be addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, August 26th. The Editor's decision is final.

Result of "Three Letters" Competition.

The first prize of a Solid Silver Pencil-case offered in this competition has been awarded to Mr. Fred Farr, Union Infirmary, Hampton, Evesham. Consolation prizes go to the following: Miss L. Thomson, 1 Church Row, Garratt Lane, Lower Tooting, S.W.; James M. Braidwood, 6 Gladstone Ter., Edinburgh; Miss Rose Lee, 24 Dorothy Street, Hightown, Manchester; Alexander Bruce, 4 Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham; Miss Tucker, 293 Finchley Road, N.W.; Edwin Pearson, 417 Blackburn Road, Accrington, Lanes.; Miss Maggie B. Stuart, 12 Garnet Terrace, Mt. Florida, Glasgow; Mrs. H. J. Callander, 6 Brunton Terrace, Sunderland; Cecil J. Pearson, 140 Belgrave Road, Walthamstow; C. Buckley, 35 Walton Street, Heywood; John Connelly, 16 High Street, Dumbarton.

Result of "Cat" Competition.

Drawings of all sorts and conditions of cats were sent in, and the Silver Pencil-case has been awarded to Mr. Gilbert H. Dodd, 19 Talbot Street, Mauldeth Road, Withington, Manchester. The following have received consolation gifts: J. Thomson, 5 W. Montgomery Place, Edinburgh; F. N. L. Daubeny, Woodville, Alumhurst Road, Bournemouth; A. Bruce, 4 Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham; W. E. Raymond, 8 College View, Bootle; Dorothy Griffiths, 186 Brighton Road, Croydon; J. McLay, 12 Burndyke Street, Govan, Glasgow; Mrs. E. Fisher, 63 Bold Street, Altrincham; R. Thomson, 5 W. Montgomery Place, Edinburgh; Mrs. Worrell, 3 Guy's Cliff Road, Leamington Spa; F. Peterson, 17 Oakfield Street, Altrincham.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be inclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor does not hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

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THE GREAT "PASS-IT-ALONG" SCHEME.

First Award, £10. Second Award, £5. Third Award, £2. Six Awards of 10s. each.

(A)

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE COMPETITOR WHO SENDS THIS COPY.

When you have carefully read these rules, put an ink line round the instructions in the next column, write your name and address in the space at the foot of this page*, and in the next column; wrap up this copy of SHORT STORIES in a wrapper, fix a penny stamp on it, and post it to a friend of yours whom you think will help you. Then wait until the copy is returned to you.

All you need do is to send out your copy or copies of SHORT STORIES and wait until they come back to you with the names filled in.

The first prize will be awarded to the person whose copies of SHORT STORIES contain the greatest number of signatures of people to whom the copies have been sent, provided that the wrappers which carried the copies of SHORT STORIES through the post to each person accompany the list.

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There is no absolute necessity to write a letter to your friend explaining the scheme, but if you did so it would carry more weight.

HOW TO SEND IN.

Keep the wrappers as they are sent to you, and when this copy comes back send all the wrappers, together with this copy, to the Editor of "Short Stories," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "PASS-IT-ALONG," to arrive not later than first post Thursday, September 4th.

NOTE.—Competitors may send out at the same time any number of copies of this issue.

The Editor's decision is final, and readers may enter only on this understanding.

(B)

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Fill in your name at once and post it on the day this is received. If you keep it longer it will lessen the chance of the original sender securing the first prize, as the paper will not be able to get into so many hands within the time limit.

If you receive this copy on Saturday, August 30th, fill up your name and post it at once to the sender, whose name appears at the foot of this page.

Why Not Try Yourself?

If you want to enter for this competition yourself, and win one of the prizes, get a copy of SHORT STORIES from your newsagent at once, and follow the instructions marked "A."

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Those who sign here will get a prize each if this wins first award.

*Name and Address of Competitor.....

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THE GHOST OF AN OLD LOVE.

And a Man who Married the Ghost.

IF ever John C. Studley came near believing in ghosts it was on the second day of July, at half-past three in the afternoon.

On that day and at that hour he had made his way through the woods that fringe the sandy cliffs near Sealand Bay, and had come out where he could look down over the whole length of the shimmering bay—and it was then he saw the ghost.

It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon; the rattle of hammers came up from the little ship-yard below; three visitors in a boat were pulling three various ways—yet it was under these most prosaic signs of the realities of life that he saw the ghost of Agnes Thorpe sitting under a tree, sketching the scene he had known so well twenty-two years ago.

Twenty-two years ago he had lived in the neighbouring village of straggling Kilcombe, the only son of old Captain Studley, and had sat many, many times either under this very tree, or one very much like it, while Agnes had sketched, as she was sketching now. Then one day he had said something that was unjust. She had called it cruel; angry words had passed, and what might have been smoothed over by a syllable of explanation had ended as a violent quarrel. In the wild illogicality of the angry man, he had thought that by causing her pain he would alleviate his own, and so had shipped on his father's whaler, and had sailed to the ice-fields and the snow. But man's temper is rarely formative, it is never an arbiter of fate, and storm and stress followed close on his heels for ten years. Then, when 'twas too late for him to return home, Dame Fortune had wooed him as though he were the best man in the world, and he was rich. Rich, without a soul to share his riches, and, about three weeks ago, a wave of loneliness and homesickness had borne him back here.

He had not been nearly so sentimentally affected as he had imagined would be the case, and now, just as he had come to the conclusion that the old place was very stupid, all the old memories had been revived in this startling fashion.

For it was startling, and he felt his heart beat faster as he looked at the wraith of his dead love. Then, as he hesitated whether to turn and run or address the spirit, a little fox terrier bounded from beside her ghostly ladyship and ran with sharps barks towards him.

"Come here, Gyp," cried the ghost, and even then Studley could not forbear another shiver, for the voice was that of Agnes.

But having seen strange sights and mastered himself, and drawing near, said, though quite tremblingly:

"Is your name Agnes Thorpe?"

No woman could look on Studley's face without feeling that it was that of a man of which some men might be afraid, but of which no woman could be. So—and for another reason, as you shall hear—it was that the ghostly artist said, and smiled as she said it:

"No, but that was my mother's name."

Then it all came to him in that swiftness of light with which he had so often seen the dawn rush in down there in the tropics, and he knew that his old love lived again in her daughter.

"My foolish question will show you that that does not surprise me," he said, "for you look very like her—your mother, I mean."

"You knew her then?"

"Indeed I did," he answered, "as perhaps you might know and as perhaps you might not, if I told you that my name is Studley—John C. Studley."

"Of course, of course," the girl said, tilting back her sunbonnet, the better to look clearly at him, "I might have known it, had not my mother told me many times that you were dead."

"I was," he said, "dead to her, a suicide of love. And she, of course, is dead to me?"

"She is dead as our lives go," said the girl, "but she was never dead to you as love goes, Mr. Studley. She lived and died loving you, and my father, who is also dead, knew that and accepted her duty and wifely affection as the sweetest substitute she had to offer."

"Wonderful, and wonderfully sad," said the man. "'Twas all my evil and wrong."

"She never said so," said the girl. Then added: "And you loved her, did you not?"

"Well," said Studley, "if I was cruel and harsh, at least I have been consistent in my penance—if you can call a penance that which it was no pain to do—for I have never bestowed a duty and affection on any other woman."

"That's good; that's right," said the girl; "that's as I would have a man love me."

"There are many strange things about this meeting," he said at length, pinching the dog's cropped ears, for man and beast were already friends. "One is that I had meant to go away to-morrow and now I don't want to go away at all."

"Well, must you?" asked the girl.

"No," he replied. "I am a fairly old man, with no encumbrances—except those of property hardly won."

"Now, as to being an old man," said the girl severely, "that is arrant foolishness. I have a picture of you at home that my mother gave me and you look exactly like it."

He laughed. "That's the reason you didn't know who I was when I asked who you were," he said.

"Well, I did half know you then," said the girl, "but I thought you were dead, while you didn't know at all who I was, for you thought I was your old sweetheart come to life. So that really evens up our errors and," here she laughed too, "in a kind of whimsical way, it makes us of about the same age, doesn't it?"

"Do you know," he said, after a little while, "I feel exactly as though I was again playing court to Agnes Thorpe through you?"

"Yes?" she said quietly. "Then I suppose I ought to feel as though I were being courted as a reincarnation of my mother?"

"And do you?" he asked.

"Almost," she replied.

"I wonder," he said, with a quaver in his voice, "I wonder it could ever—possibly—happen—that you could feel so altogether?"

The new Agnes did not answer, but surely you can guess that as the time went by he found out what that silence meant.

T. J. Vivian.

The Little Chap Knew.

A CLERGYMAN was speaking to a Sunday-school class. "Now, can any little boy tell me," he asked, "what is grace?" There was a moment's silence. Presently a diminutive boy of not more than ten summers held up his hand. "Please sir, I know," said he. The minister was pleased. "Well, what is it?" he asked. "Why, please, sir," said the small boy, "he's the champion cricketer."

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All's Right with the World.

By DAISY PENDER CUDLIP.

FIRST HALF OF THE STORY.

MRS. LESLIE is living with her two daughters, May and Nellie, at the fishing village of Porthtowan, near which are stationed two companies of the Royal Wessex Regiment. Captain Leonard Davies is one of her most frequent visitors, mostly on May's account, with whom he is great friends. Taking her out for a row one day, Captain Davies lands at a little sheltered cove, and, forgetting the fact that the tide is going down, gives himself up to the enjoyment of May's company. When too late they discover that the boat is high and dry between the rocks, and no amount of exertion will release it, and although they know what insinuations will probably be made against both the man and the girl, have to settle down to wait for the return of the tide. Meanwhile the seeds of calumny are speedily being sown at Porthtowan.

"For the sake of my daughter's good name I must consent."

MEANWHILE in the cottage above the village Mrs. Leslie, as the afternoon and evening wore on, began to feel anxious at the non-appearance of Captain Davies and the girls, for until Nelly casually strolled into the drawing-room at about seven o'clock Mrs. Leslie had no idea that the others had gone without her, and great was her annoyance at finding such to be the case, especially as it was getting late and the others had not come in.

"Why didn't you go with your sister this afternoon?" the mother asked querulously, so Nelly thought.

"Because it was so hot, and besides, they didn't want me, but they might have asked me nicely, I do think," went on the child in an aggrieved tone. "As it was, I just showed them I didn't care and let them go without me." Mrs. Leslie smiled at the child's pique, but found it wiser to refrain from saying anything, as she did not want to encourage this idea that the child was right in supposing her sister and Captain Davies were just as happy to be without her. As time went on and still they did not return, the mother's anxiety became keener every moment.

As May had rightly supposed, Mrs. Leslie guessed something of the state of affairs, but naturally her anxieties were all for the sake of her girl's good name. She felt very angry with Captain Davies for having exposed May to slanderous tongues, and more than half-inclined to drop his acquaintance for the future. As ill-luck would have it, after nine o'clock when she and Nelly had finished supper, and had returned to the drawing-room, a certain Mrs. Carroll, the widow of an officer who lived close to the Leslies', chose this particular evening to drop in at the cottage for a chat. She was a woman who loved gossip, a scandal was the joy of her life. During her husband's life-time she had made herself detested by every one of his brother officers, as the most obnoxious form of regimental woman who talks of "our regiment," and makes it her business to pry into the affairs of everybody.

Each subaltern as he joined the regiment fresh from Sandhurst was taken up by this woman, who, under the pretence of being kind, and "acting as a mother to the poor boy," gained from their guileless and trusting young lips many a family and personal confidence, which to their infinite surprise became miraculously known to everyone before very long.

At her husband's death she removed from the sphere of regimental mischief-maker. She had settled down at Porthtowan, far enough away from the garrison town of the former life for economy, but, alas, for her friends, quite near enough for gossip to reach her, and be made the most of by her foolish tongue, for she was more a fool than malicious. However, these are by far the most dangerous class, as unfortunately people believe them more readily because "they are so good natured."

In a very short time her lynx-eyes noted something was wrong from Mrs. Leslie's nervous, constrained manner. "Where is May?" she queried. Before her mother could answer Nelly chimed in with "She went out ever so early with Captain Davies this afternoon, and she hasn't come back yet."

"Not come back yet!" in tones of assumed astonishment. "My dear Mrs. Leslie, how shocking, and so compromising for poor dear May. But perhaps after all it is all right, and they are engaged. I saw them in the boat from my window this afternoon about half-past three, and certainly"—with a smile that was meant to be genial, but had the effect of looking spiteful—"and certainly they both looked very happy."

"I beg, Mrs. Carroll, that you won't run away with any impression of that kind," replied Mrs. Leslie with dignity. "Captain Davies is an intimate friend of ours, and I for one am most grateful to him for his kindness to my girls, seeing they have no brother, and as to your saying they looked extremely happy, surely your sight must be wonderfully keen to see the expression of a face at such a distance."

"You forget my telescope, Mrs. Leslie, you forget my little telescope." She said these words in a would-be playful and wholly exasperating manner, that made Mrs. Leslie long to shake the false smile out of her. Ignoring the remark, however, she said: "I can quite see what has kept them, they have been caught by the tide or something, and I can quite trust Captain Davies not to run any needless risk."

Poor woman, she did not know what to say, but she instinctively felt she must not appear anxious before this woman.

"Of course, of course, my dear, young people have a way of forgetting such trifles as tides and other disagreeables when they are together. I quite understand that, but the calm way in which you take it certainly surprises me."

Mrs. Leslie looked at her and did not answer, but that *enfant terrible*, Nelly, saw her advantage and took it with the remark, "That's just it, Mrs. Carroll, those two are simply awful, we should have been stranded in Smuggler's Cove heaps of times if it hadn't been for me. They never think

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of anyone but themselves, and t just serves them right for not taking me with them this afternoon."

There are times when a child's brutal truthfulness amounts to vice. Mrs. Leslie thought so now, and frowned at Nelly, who, unconscious of any wrong-doing, gave her mother away by asking "What *are* you frowning at? What on earth have I done?"

There being no reply to make to this Mrs. Leslie took refuge in silence, while Mrs. Carroll smiled knowingly, and said, "I thought so, you see I was right after all, these little things seldom escape me." Then finding she could gain no more information, she thought it wiser to withdraw with the parting shot that she should come over the first thing in the morning to hear the cause of May's delay.

It was with a sigh of intense relief that Mrs. Leslie saw her visitor depart; then, with an unwonted energy for her, she told Nelly to put on her things and go down to the beach with her to meet the others, as they would be sure to be back soon. Accordingly the two set out to watch for the truants. They had not long to wait, however, for by the clear light of the moon, which was now high up in the heavens, they saw a boat emerge from the shadow of the Cove known as Smuggler's Cove and come rapidly towards the beach.

As the boat crossed the silver pathway, they could easily recognise Captain Davies and May. In a few minutes the boat ran ashore, and jumping quickly out, Captain Davies hauled her further up the beach, and then lifted May out of the boat. "I *am* glad you came down to meet us," he said to Mrs. Leslie. "I'm awfully sorry that it should have happened, but the truth is we neither of us noticed how the tide was going out. I had asked your daughter if she would be my wife, and we were both too happy to notice anything of the sort. Mrs. Leslie, you will give her to me—I will try and be worthy of her." His voice took an imploring tone as he noticed the hard look of annoyance against him in her face.

"For the sake of my daughter's good name I suppose I shall have to give my consent," she answered coldly.

"May," she went on severely, "go home at once with your sister, I will follow with Captain Davies,"

Obediently she prepared to do as she was told, and with one look of love and confidence at her lover, she walked on with Nelly, her little head thrown a trifle higher than usual in indignation at her mother's suspicions. When they were out of ear-shot, Mrs. Leslie turned and in a low, concentrated voice, said:

"Now, Captain Davies, perhaps you will explain this business."

"Explain it!" he replied aghast, "have I not done so? I have told you exactly what happened, you surely do not suppose either of us guilty of such a piece of folly as to stay out there unless we could not possibly help it, do you?"

"I should hope not, at least I am sure my daughter is not the sort of girl to lower her dignity in that way, but how am I to know that you are not taking advantage of a girl who, having no father or brother to protect her, you think you can compromise with impunity?"

"You do me a great wrong when you imply such a thing, Mrs. Leslie," he replied. "I love your daughter dearly, and her honour is as dear to me as my own; surely the proof of this lies in the fact of my asking her to be my wife. Thank God I shall have the right to defend her good name now."

"You haven't then proposed to her from a mere sense of duty to protect her good name?" she asked doubtingly.

"Certainly not; we were engaged before we discovered that the tide had gone out, so no one can say anything, can they?"

"I hope not, I'm sure, but I'm afraid the majority won't believe it—however."

"We'll make them believe it, and don't you worry about it any more, Mrs. Leslie, you'll find a man a useful thing to have in a house—like a five-pound note or a Nasmyth hammer. People won't say disagreeable things so readily when there is a man to take up the cudgels on your behalf." And he laughed light-heartedly as he spoke.

"My dear boy, I sco

"Mrs. Leslie, you will give her to me—I will try to be worthy of her," he pleaded.
"For the sake of my daughter's good name I suppose I shall have to give my consent," she answered, coldly.

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you are going to be a considerate son to me, and I shall rely on you entirely. As you say, a man *is* a useful thing to have in a house; no one realises that better than I do since my husband's death, because I know the want of it." And she took his two hands in hers. "I shall not ask you in to-night as it is too late, but you may come and see May any time you like to-morrow. In the meantime, good-night, and think yourself lucky at having escaped my wrath so easily."

"Good-night, Mrs. Leslie," and he turned to go, then, hesitating a moment, he said, "You'll make it all right with May, won't you?"

"Of course I will," and with a much lighter heart than had been her portion an hour before, Mrs. Leslie made her way back to the cottage.

"I Demand an Apology!"

Good as her word, Mrs. Carroll put in an appearance the following morning, and was greeted with the news of May's engagement by Nelly, who prefaced her remarks with the words, "Didn't I say so."

Mrs. Carroll, after effusively congratulating May, went on to say "How lucky it was that Captain Davies was such an honourable fellow, as some men would not have acted as he had done, but," she continued, "as it had all turned out well nothing more need be said," with many other remarks of a like nature.

May, not knowing what was in her mind, thought her rather peculiar, and then thought no more about it.

Time went on, and it was arranged that the young people should be married at Christmas, there being no reason why they should wait.

It must be confessed that the news of Captain Davies' engagement and approaching marriage was not well received by the unmarried portion of his mess. They deeply deplored the fact, for Leonard was voted by one and all a "thundering good fellow," and it was a thousand pities he should give up his bachelor freedom for any woman, let alone a chit of a girl who had apparently "tricked him into matrimony," from which it may be inferred that Mrs. Carroll had, as per usual, been giving her version of the case at various tea-fights, which version had circulated very rapidly, much to poor unoffending May's detriment.

Had Leonard known anything of this he would have been furious, but he was the last man in the world to whom anyone would repeat gossip, either about himself or anyone connected with him. Consequently he went on in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was being pitied for having been "caught" by a match-making mother, and a clever, though seemingly innocent daughter.

* * * * *

The wedding, which was to be a quiet affair, was fixed for the first week in January, so that the honeymoon should fit in with the leave season.

A few evenings before this, the bachelors of the regiment entertained Leonard at a farewell dinner, for on his return from leave he would be a Benedict, a married man, and then domestic life would claim him for its own.

They drank his health frequently, and finally with musical honours, shouting very much out of time and tune. "For he's a Jolly Good Fellow," but still no one proposed the health of the bride-elect. At length the youngest subaltern present, who had imbibed a good deal more champagne than was good for him, got up very unsteadily, and to the consternation and horror of all, delivered himself of the following words:

"Gentlemen, on an occasion of this sort, the health of bride-elect is usually proposed, and as junior subaltern present, that duty involves on me, I suppose I ought to say that pleasant duty, but I shall not, as I consider under the circumstances it is nothing of the sort." Here someone tried to stop him and pull him down in his chair, but the boy, hardly responsible for his actions, would not be stopped. "Shut up," he muttered, "I will say what I think, and what all of you think, only you haven't the pluck to say so, that Davies has been 'caught,' and I'm not going to propose the health of a girl who tricks a man into marrying her." He shouted out the last words so as to be heard above the noise, for at his insulting words every man sprang up from his seat, and several tried to pull the boy down. As for Captain Davies, he was white with rage, and utter blank astonishment.

The next instant he sprang at the offender and would have knocked him down, had not several others intervened.

"If you don't eat your words, you young cur," he muttered, "I'll break every bone in your body. What the dickens is the meaning of this infernal lie?" he asked, turning to the other men, and noting the fierce red light in his eyes, no one liked to risk a reply.

"Do you hear?" he went on. "I demand an explanation and an apology, on behalf of the lady who is to be my wife."

"We are all most heartily sorry for what has occurred, and I am sure when Barker is sober no one will be sorrier than himself," said Captain Hall, who was the senior officer present. Then, turning to one of the other men, he told him to take Mr. Barker to his quarters.

"Sorry! I should think he would be, the insolent young cad, but I shall expect something more than that; I mean to have some explanation of his meaning which doubtless some of you can give me. In fact, in justice to Miss Leslie, I demand an explanation."

"Since you demand it, Davies, I suppose I had better tell you, but I fancy Barker must have got hold of and believed the rumour about your engagement, I mean the way it happened." And Captain Hall looked very uncomfortable as he spoke. He liked Leonard very much, and it was a most painful task for him to be obliged to tell him what the rumour was.

"I don't understand; will you kindly speak more plainly, if you please?"

Leonard was speaking very calmly, and apparently unmoved, but anyone who noticed how the words came from between closed teeth, and how the red light of anger blazed in his eyes, would have known he was far from being unmoved.

"I hate having to tell you, old chap, but hang me, you must know, people say you proposed to her to save a scandal."

"What!" he exclaimed, starting up fiercely—all his apparent calm forsaking him, in the suddenness of the shock Captain Hall's words conveyed.

"It's a lie, and I'll horse-whip the fellow who started it within an inch of his life. The brute!"

"I expect you'll find some woman is the originator and unfortunately a woman cannot be horse-whipped, so thinks she may say things with impunity. But what course do you mean to take with Barker? Shall you have him put under arrest for insulting you?" Captain Hall asked anxiously.

"I should most certainly have done so had I alone been concerned," he replied; "as it is, I shall demand an apology and hush the matter up for Miss Leslie's sake, and also for the credit of the regiment. I think," he went on slowly, "Barker will probably find it advisable to exchange."

"Thanks, old fellow; I'm glad you look on it in that light, it would have been a ghastly disgrace to the regiment if this thing were known. Up to this point we have had no cads, and, as you say, Barker must go.

"You may look to me to help you in clearing up this affair, old chap," he went on, holding out his hand which Leonard shook. "I fear a good many have got hold of this rumour, and we shall have to clear it up before your marriage. By the way, it's to be on Saturday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Saturday, and to-day is Monday, and as ill-luck will have it, I'm bound to run up to town to see my people on business to-morrow, and can't possibly get back until Thursday. What on earth is to be done?" Leonard leant his head wearily on his hand. The two men were left alone, all the others having gone to discuss the affair elsewhere.

"If you will trust me with the facts of the case, I think I can make it all right for you, old chap, for when I know the facts I shall then be able to contradict all the rumours that are about."

Then Leonard told him exactly all that had happened. He also told how Mrs. Leslie had met them on the beach, and the subsequent interview he had had with her, but did

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not think of mentioning the interest Mrs. Carroll had taken in the affair.

Captain Hall listened attentively to all that was said; then, after a few moments, he asked him if anyone else in Porthtowan was likely to know of their having been caught by the tide at the time.

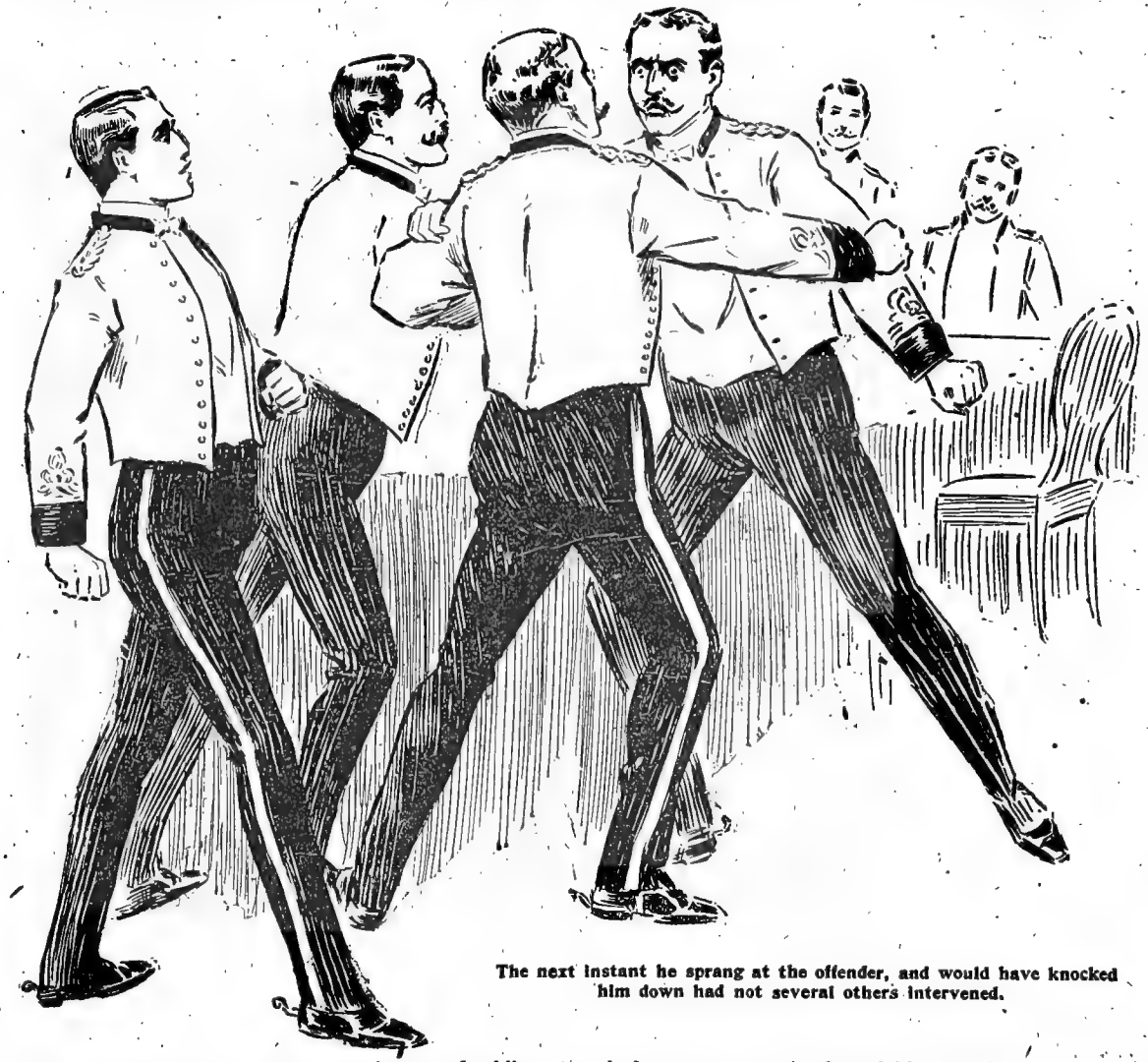
Then the riddle began to solve itself to Leonard's mind. He recalled things Nelly had let fall regarding Mrs. Carroll's visit on the eventful evening, and how she, Mrs. Carroll, had "asked mamma if Captain Davies and May were engaged, and when mamma said no, how Mrs. Carroll had seemed awfully amused, and then went home, chuckling to herself," as Nelly expressed it. None of these things had struck him at the time, but now he understood it all, and realised that Mrs. Carroll was at the bottom of all the mischief.

"I've got it all," he exclaimed, with more force than elegance. "It's that Mrs. Carroll, she must be made to contradict what she has said to everybody she has said it to. Do you think you can undertake the task in my absence?"

"I'll make her, my dear fellow. It's the least she can do. I'll get her version of the affair from her, show her what are the facts of the case and make her promise to set things right so far as she can by publicly acknowledging she was wrong."

"I don't see how you are going to do that—it isn't such an easy matter."

"I'll go with her to this 'At Home' at Government House on Wednesday; the conversation is sure to turn on Miss Leslie's wedding the following day, and then Mrs. Carroll shall contradict the rumours she has circulated. If she funks it I shall fix her with this gimlet eye of mine until she is forced to own up. This 'At Home' business is most lucky, as everyone in the neighbourhood will be there, and the truth will very soon spread."



The next instant he sprang at the offender, and would have knocked him down had not several others intervened.

This plan, being the best thing under the circumstances, was finally decided upon, much to Leonard's relief.

Whereupon the two men rose and left the mess together, to discuss the matter more fully in Leonard's quarters.

* * * * * *

Tuesday evening saw Leonard in town, where, awaiting him at his club, he found a letter from May, the contents of which staggered him beyond words. It ran as follows:

"You will doubtless be surprised at receiving a letter

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from me so soon after our interview this afternoon"—the letter was dated "Monday night"—"But, fearing for the first time the real state of the case, I rejoice that I am not too late to release you from your engagement, and the prospect of a marriage that could only be irksome to you. I fully appreciate and thank you for the chivalrous motive that prompted you to act as you did, and in such a way, believe me, as to completely blind my eyes to the real state of the case. Knowing now, as I do, that you had never intended to ask me to be your wife, and only did so in order to shield my name from scandal that might have arisen owing to a mere piece of carelessness just as much my fault as yours, I cannot trade any longer upon your generosity, or risk having it said that I had done so. I hope you will as thoroughly understand and appreciate my motive in breaking off our engagement, as I do appreciate your motive in having asked me to marry you.—Good-bye. "MAY."

P.S.—Mother, Nelly, and I are going to travel for a time, we leave here on Saturday.

"Good God! And Saturday was to have been our wedding day," exclaimed the man, as he finished reading the letter. "This must be put right at once. I must let her know I am not going to be given my *congé* so easily."

And seating himself at one of the tables he wrote a long letter explaining the whole thing, how the malicious rumour had been set going by Mrs. Carroll, and pointing out how absolutely untrue it all was.

"There is only one thing I fear," he wrote, "and that is, that when you learn I asked you to marry me simply because I loved you, and wanted you with no thought of saving your name from any scandal, two great virtues with which you had accredited me will be found wanting, namely, chivalry and generosity. But, my darling, if you will be content with the proof of my love for you now, the privilege of acting chivalrously and generously to you in the future shall be mine, and you may be sure it is a privilege I shall rejoice in. Let me hear no more talk of travelling abroad with your mother and Nelly on Saturday. I am coming to fetch you myself, and then *I* mean to take you *with me*. I am writing to your mother. Till Saturday, my darling little wife that is to be, good-bye,

"Yours ever, LEONARD."

Having sealed, addressed, and posted the letters which should put everything right, Leonard then set about the business about which he had come to town.

* * * * *

Saturday dawned bright and frosty, the little village looking in the bright, winter sunshine almost as picturesque as it did in the summer. The sea was beautifully calm and blue, and in fact everything conduced to make the day an ideal one for a bride. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the time fixed for the wedding, the old church on the cliff was crowded with friends, and a large number of the fisher-folk with whom "Miss May" was a great favourite.

In spite of the wedding being a very quiet one, the excitement that had prevailed during the last few days about it, and the rumour that at the last moment Miss Leslie had broken off the match on hearing the rumours that were afloat, had made the wedding one of great interest in the neighbourhood.

And popular favour had veered round suddenly in favour of the girl who had been so terribly maligned, and had been so plucky about it. Captain Davies was at his post looking as most bridegrooms do, like a fish out of water, and being continually told by his best man, Captain Hill, "to bear up."

The officers of the regiment had turned up in full force to support him in the trying moment, and to make some amends for the unfortunate event of a few evenings before, all except Mr. Barker, who, after an abject apology, had applied for an exchange which was subsequently obtained.

At a few minutes past two a carriage was heard driving smartly up over the gravel, and murmurs of "the bride" ran through the church.

* * * * *

The ceremony was over, the registers were duly signed, and they were man and wife. The organ, as they left the vestry, pealed forth Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," announcing the fact that "they were coming" to those outside. Showers of rice greeted the unfortunate couple as they emerged from under the porch, thrown by the children and fisher-women, who, with the barbarity of their class on such occasions, were unsparing in the supplies.

"Good luck to you, Mrs. Davies," called out one of the Royal Wessex Subalterns who had gone round to the other side of the carriage, then, starting three hearty cheers, he waved his hat after them as they drove off, the cheering being vigorously taken up by the people, while Nelly, forgetful of her dignity as bridesmaid, joined in with the rest. Captain Hill, with mock solemnity, reminded her of the dignities of her position both as a bridesmaid and also as being Miss Leslie now her sister was married.

"It's all very well," she answered, "but how can I be dignified with these?" looking ruefully down at a pair of long black legs, and making everyone laugh.

A couple of hours later Captain and Mrs. Davies left for London *en route* for the south of France.

"Leonard," said the newly made wife, putting her little hand in his, "do you know I can hardly believe that I am really and truly your wife, it seems too good to be true."

"It's true enough, little woman, and I hope I may never cause you to regret the fact."

And drawing her gently towards him he kissed her tenderly.

THE END.

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Love the Leveller.

The Romance of a Machine Room.

She threaded her way daintily through the great shop with its bewildering whirr of machinery and its roaring fires—its flying sparks and dirt and dust and smoke.

Now and again she stopped to watch some giant machine perform its almost human work. The men, with their splendid muscles and perfect skill, interested her immensely. But her companion was distinctly bored. The grime and sweat and dirt offended his aristocratic senses and the noise jarred upon his ears.

"What you can find interesting in this pandemonium I cannot imagine," he expostulated. "It is bad enough for those who have to be here and do the work; but to deliberately seek it when the sun is shining outside, the roads are hard and a motor car is waiting, is beyond me."

"Oh, Philip, can't you feel the thrill of seeing things done by real people?" she replied. "Just look at that man at the forge! See the great muscles stand out as he lifts the hammer. And see how skilfully he shapes the iron! The strength of a giant, the delicate touch of a woman—it is grand!"

"Well, I'm blessed if I can see it that way," rejoined the man. "Far from seeming romantic, it looks to me as though the fellow might as well be in prison as be compelled to spend his time doing that kind of work. Of course, I suppose they are used to this sort of labour—and somebody has to do it—but I can't say I care to see them at it—anyway, on a fine day with fresh air and a lively spin awaiting me."

Just the shadow of impatience crossed the girl's face at this speech, but she laughed merrily and continued her way through the shop.

It was Ida's first visit to the great works of which her father was the owner. She had been reared in the exclusive atmosphere of wealth, and her vision had not reached much beyond her father's palatial mansion, the theatres, the other palatial mansions in "our set," and the Continental tour.

Of course, she knew about the great mills, but heretofore to her they had been simply acres of gloomy, smoking prisons, from which there was wrested the money that brought all the good things.

On this pleasant day in the early Autumn, wearied with the conventional round of pleasures and pastimes with which she was surfeited, and somewhat aroused by a novel she had been reading, which dealt with the world of workers, she had determined to see the inside of those great smoky shops and find out just what was going on there and the manner of men who lived among them.

Her father had laughed at her whim, and as he had not time that day to go with her, Philip Hammond acted as her escort. Philip was her constant champion—her destined husband—the son of Mr. Norton's life-long friend, a successful banker.

It was but a moment after the conversation recorded between Miss Norton and Mr. Hammond that an accident occurred.

A man directly ahead of the visitors, carrying a heavy load on his shoulder, made a mis-step, fell against a great leather belt, and was carried off his feet and upward with the belt. As he realised his danger he gave a fearful shriek and his eyes met those of Miss Norton. The mortal terror in them burnt into her very soul and she shrieked—

"Philip, Philip, save him! Oh, save him!"

She saw the wheel to which the belt was dragging him and knew that he must be crushed.

Philip also saw the fearful danger, but stood as one paralysed.

He could have reached the man from where he was, but stood trembling with white face and horror-stricken eyes.

The attention of the entire shop had been attracted by the shrieks, and a score of men were running towards the scene.

"Pull that lever, you there with the white cap! The black one! Quick! Throw off the belt!" came in clear, commanding tones from behind. But Hammond did not stir. He threw up one hand to shut out the sight of the man being crushed.

In the meantime past the two visitors sprang the man who had shouted.

It was the blacksmith from the forge.

The man on the belt was right in the clutch of the wheel.

It seemed to Ida that she must surely faint.

At that instant the blacksmith made a lunge at a revolving wheel, caught two of the iron spokes and braced his stalwart legs.

It seemed as though he would be thrown against the machine beyond—but no, the wheel stopped with a jerk.

The muscles on the blacksmith's arms and chest stood out like whipcords.

"Quick, boys, quick!" he cried; "I can't stand this long."

He had no need to urge. Already two workmen had hoisted a third to their shoulders, and he pulled the victim from the wheel, with one arm badly crushed, but alive.

Then the blacksmith let go the wheel, and the machinery restarted to whirr and buzz. The men crowded about him, offering congratulations.

"Well, I'm blest, Joe. You saved Mike from bein' made into mincemeat that time. I didn't think it could be done. By Jove, Joe, I'd like to have your muscle."

These and similar compliments were fired at him as he turned with a broad grin to his forge.

Directly in his way stood a beautiful girl with blanched face, her great brown eyes swimming in tears.

"Oh, sir, I want to say that you are the bravest and strongest and quickest man I ever saw. I cannot thank you too much. I was afraid he would be crushed to death.

He flushed to the roots of his hair.

"It was nothing, miss," he said. "Any of the men would have done it."

That evening Ida went over the scene with her father. He knew all about it and told her that the rescuer was Joseph Madern.

"One of the best men we have," he said warmly. "A thorough mechanic and an inventor. We keep him at the forge because there is a particular part of a machine that has to be done by hand, and Madern does it better than anybody else. Few men have the strength and skill combined to do it. We pay him as well as though he were a foreman, but have to keep him at the forge. I have ordered that he be handsomely rewarded for his heroism to-day."

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"Papa, I want you to invite him to dinner," suddenly said Ida, after some minutes spent in thought.

"Who?" asked Mr. Norton, looking up from his paper.

"Mr. Madern. I think it would be a much nicer way to show appreciation of his heroism than merely to give him money."

Mr. Norton smiled. He was not wholly undemocratic in his instincts.

"But your mother," he said.

She had an answer, and the result was that Joe Madern found himself with palpitating heart going up the steps of the Norton mansion one evening.

He was neatly dressed and bore himself with a demeanour that charmed the girl as much as his exhibition of strength.

Mrs. Norton absented herself from dinner with cold disapproval.

After dinner Miss Norton took her strange guest to the library, and was astonished at the wide knowledge he displayed of books and the strong opinions he held on economic topics.

He told her of their working-men's club and the discussions they had. "You should attend one of our open meetings; it would interest you," he said.

"I will," she replied, and she did, and was still more astounded to hear him in debate where he stood like a lion to fight for his opinions, using always the most forceful language and displaying the widest reading and information.

She invited him to call, and he did once or twice. As he was about to take his departure on the second occasion, he said—

"I think this is the last time, Miss Norton, that I will see you, and I want to tell you how thoroughly I appreciate your kindness and how much I have enjoyed the evenings I have spent here."

"The last time?" she repeated, the blood rushing to her face. "What do you mean? You are not going away?"

"No, but it is better that I should not see you. We belong to different worlds. They do not mix. The very keenness of the pleasure I feel in coming here warns me that I had better not."

"There is only one world for kindred spirits," she said impulsively.

"Do you mean that? Do you know what you are saying?" he demanded, coming close to her.

She stood with downcast eyes. Then, straightening his broad shoulders and throwing back his head, he said: "Miss Norton, I am a plain, blunt man of the people and not versed in the ways of Society. I have discovered that I love you and I know that it would be presumptuous to propose for your hand. I do not quite understand what you mean by your last remark. If you mean that you consider that we are on a social equality I want to say that I love you with a love as deep and as honest as man ever had for a woman. I can offer you nothing but that which my arms may earn, and that is not what you have been accustomed to. Still, if it should so happen that your exceeding kindness to me means that you love me, all that is nothing."

He stood looking at her as in a dream. She swayed, and fell into his arms.

"That's what it does mean," she whispered. "You are the only real man I ever saw."

There was a dreadful scene when Madern spoke to Mr. Norton, but he sturdily told his employer that he had been accepted by Ida and they were going to marry with or without parental consent.

Mr. Norton summoned his daughter, and she corroborated the statement of her plebeian lover.

Then Mr. Norton told them that the girl had not a penny in her own right, and if she married Madern she never would have.

To which Madern replied that that pleased him exactly.

They were married. Madern left the employ of the Norton works and found another position.

The Nortons were unrelenting until some three years later, Mrs. Norton being dead and a fine baby boy having been born in a certain rose-covered cottage in the suburbs, Mr. Norton softened.

Now Madern is superintendent of the Norton works and a still better position may shortly be his.

W. Wendham.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

August 19.—A mixed year; business worries, and trouble with friends. Don't speculate. Clerks, teachers, and travellers will be in danger of losing their situations. Girls need care in love affairs, and must place very little confidence in male friends.

The day is bad to ask favours, travel, and sign papers. Good for dealing in property and land.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate and should work for others.

August 20.—An unfavourable birthday; have a care against mishap if using horses. Business and home affairs cause anxiety. Don't change residence.

Single girls will meet with disappointment in love, and must beware of false friends.

The day is evil and should not be used for marriage, doing business with governmental bodies, builders, or lawyers.

A child born to-day will be improvident, easy-going, and very unsettled. May become too fond of drink and pleasure.

August 21.—A good year for business; aged persons, speculators, and farmers benefit. Avoid law and guard against theft.

Girls will meet with some strange adventures in love matters, and will have attentions from married men.

The day is good for doing business with elderly people, but not with the young.

A child born here will be fairly fortunate. The mind will be active, cautious, and painstaking; the temper quick and strong.

August 22.—A successful year for business and finances. Friends can be made use of.

Many pleasant events for young girls; if engaged they will marry.

The day is good for marriage, making new friends, dealing with professional people and manufacturers of woollen goods.

A child born here will be generous, make friends easily, and will be fortunate in life.

August 23.—Beware of serious quarrels, law, and mishap. Much activity and little good fortune in business and domestic affairs.

Not a good time for love affairs.

The day is one to go steady; avoid speculation, and be careful against accident, especially if working underground or near water.

A child born here should keep in employ. It will be headstrong, quarrelsome, and sarcastic.

August 24.—Guard against loss in business and speculations. Those in employ are fortunate. Don't lend to friends or losses will result.

Girls will meet with disappointment in love; marriages are delayed through bad state of lovers' finances.

A child born to-day will be too generous and free. Will gain the respect of superiors and do best in employ.

August 25.—A good year for health, wealth, and business. Can enter into new premises, sign agreements, and buy property.

Young females receive attentions from widowers; if born near six a.m. they will have chances of marriage.

A child born to-day will be active, cheerful, and industrious, will be fortunate in employ or in business for itself.

Asturel.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

FRANKIE DEFIES LASCELLES AND DEFEATS HOPE.

THE STORY STARTS HERE.

CYNTHIA HAMILTON, a young girl from a Brûges convent, comes to England in the capacity of companion to her cousin, Frances Norton, whom she has not seen since they were together at school. Mrs. Norton will never talk about her past, which she spent in Jamaica.

Cynthia discovers that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the on-lookers finds them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it.

Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different.

Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation.

The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room; Cynthia, however, stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope.

While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard.

On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

Mrs. Norton and Cynthia go to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis Blount, instigated by jealousy, entices Cynthia to bet heavily, by which she loses £800. Mrs. Norton has also lost heavily, and to pay her own debts, she prevails upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, Mrs. Norton comes face to face with a man from Jamaica who knows all about her past life. Percival Hope has brought him in. It is a critical moment, but once again Mrs. Norton scores. She persuades Cynthia to engage Hope's attention by making love to him, while she herself purchases the Jamaica man's silence. He agrees to be silent for the sum of £1,000 to be paid before noon on the following day. Cynthia is immediately dispatched to Fluffy's chambers to get the money. It is past midnight, and while she is negotiating with Fluffy, Percival Hope bursts into the room.

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CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

New Series of Stories.

THERE was that in Percival's face that made me wish to hide my own. I would not meet his eyes, but glanced appealingly towards Fluffy.

Mr. Thomson's self-possession did not fail him for a moment. He gently closed the door, walked quietly towards Percival, and offered him a chair.

"I'm very glad you happened to drop in just now," he said, as if it were quite an ordinary thing for Percival to call on him at midnight. "You've turned up just in the nick of time. Miss Cynthia," he smiled encouragingly at me, "is in a little difficulty. I'm sure you won't object to help her."

Percival ignored the chair, but schooled himself to listen. He even contrived to answer with an appearance of interest.

"No, not at all," he said.

But that was the breaking point of self-possession; with an abrupt movement he turned his back on Fluffy and leant towards me.

"What are you doing here?" he said fiercely, "at such an hour?"

Before I could reply, had I been able to do so, Fluffy interfered.

"Miss Hamilton came here to ask for my assistance," he said in a cold, level voice. As he spoke he laid his hand on Percival's arm, and swung him round, so that they faced each other.

"The child is in trouble," he continued, his eyes fixed steadily on Percival. "For the moment she is very worried, and—a little excited. With her permission I will tell you what that trouble is." He smiled kindly towards me, but I could make no answering sign.

Was it possible that Fluffy meant to give Frankie away? If not, what explanation could he offer for my visit? I waited in breathless expectation.

Percival was pale with rage. He bit his lips, and his hands trembled with passion. He was within an ace of losing once again control of tongue and temper, but something in the other's voice and manner, in the look of those small grey eyes, seemed to hold and master him.

For the moment Fluffy was the stronger man.

"Miss Cynthia was at the Derby yesterday," he went on slowly, "and, like the rest of us, backed Nestor. As a consequence she finds herself let in for some eight hundred pounds. More sensitive than the majority on the score of debts—gambling debts at any rate—she cannot feel happy till the bets are paid. Now, as you know, I am Mrs. Norton's man of business, and Miss Hamilton thought on this occasion I might act as hers. There are certain mining shares in Miss Cynthia's possession—they belonged, I understand, to her father—from the sale of which she hopes to raise the money for her bets. She looked to me to know what the shares would fetch, and to dispose of them for her. I am, however, leaving for the Continent to-morrow, or rather this morning. Miss Cynthia was aware of this, and realised that to-night was her only opportunity of seeing me. Ignorant of the value of the shares, and, failing me, at a loss for anyone to help her, she seized the opportunity. She came here to-night to bring these shares." He handed Percival some papers off the table. "You understand?" Fluffy tapped the papers as he spoke, but somehow I don't think his question had reference *only* to the shares.

I half expected Percival to show anger at the news that I'd been betting. I looked at any rate for some expression of displeasure. His attitude was very different, however. It seemed to me suggestive of relief!

"Yes," he said, with a little gasp, "I quite understand—mining shares I think you said, American aren't they?" Then turning towards me flushed and eager, he stretched out his hand.

I don't know what he was going to say, but I fancy it was something apologetic.

"Miss Cynthia," he commenced, "please believe me——"

Fluffy interrupted him.

"You're going to help us dispose of the shares, is that it, Mr. Hope?" he said sharply, and with a look I could not read.

"Of course, of course." Percival turned crimson and seemed positively abashed. "What can I do?" he asked, appealing to Fluffy. "I am most anxious to assist."

Fluffy calmly lit a cigarette, and took up his position on the hearthrug.

"The case stands thus," he said slowly; "the shares in my opinion ought to fetch a thousand pounds."

"I should say quite," remarked Percival, "their price fluctuates very little."

Fluffy nodded.

"If I were in town I could put the thing through to-morrow. As it is I shall have to commission a jobber, which will mean delay. There's nothing else to be done unless——" He paused. "Would you take the matter in your hands, Hope?" he said, "and dispose of the shares for me, or rather for Miss Cynthia?"

"With pleasure. But I think we might devise a quicker way of selling the shares than putting them on the market."

Fluffy looked embarrassed.

"It would, of course, simplify matters for me to give Miss Hamilton a cheque here and now for the amount," he said slowly. "But, unfortunately, I'm not a rich man. To be candid, I have not so large a balance at my banker's."

Percival smiled quite nicely, and remarked that he entirely understood.

"Perhaps you would allow me to undertake that part of the affair?" he said. "Suppose you hand the shares over to me, and let me draw a cheque for the amount. It would save Miss Cynthia trouble if she had the notes though, wouldn't it? I happen to have a fairly large sum on me this evening." He turned rather red and prodded a pocket book, from which he took two notes each for five hundred pounds. "I had a payment to make," he explained. (I wondered if the payment was to have been made to Casellis!) "You don't mind selling me your shares, Miss Cynthia?" he asked smiling.

"Thank you," I answered coldly, "but I prefer not to trouble you. I would rather Mr. Thomson commissioned the jobber that he mentioned."

Mr. Thomson shook his head.

"I never allow a client to interfere with the way in which I conduct their business," he said calmly. "I accept your offer, Hope, on Miss Hamilton's behalf, and thank you very much."

"Take the notes," he added, smiling at me, "and whatever you do, *don't* lose them. Are you sure they're safe? Then, that's all right. You won't bet any more, eh?"

I murmured faintly that I never would.

"I shan't be able to get round to Pont Street in the morning, I'm afraid," Fluffy continued. "I'm writing good-bye to Mrs. Norton to-night. She'll have my letter first post."

I longed to know if he intended sending the cheque Frankie had demanded, but there was no opportunity of asking him.

Fluffy accompanied us, Percival and me, to the Temple Gates, where my cab was waiting.

"You'll see her home?" he questioned Percival.

"Of course. Good night, Thomson, and good luck."

Fluffy waved adieu. I sat back in the cab, tired and inexpressibly weary.

It was a strange drive. Neither of us spoke a word, not because we had too little, but too much to say—infallibly a time for silence.

He saw me safely into the house and said good-night kindly, even tenderly.

I stumbled upstairs in the darkness and waited sleepless till Frankie returned.

She came back from the ball as fresh as when she went, and looking as young, indeed younger than I.

"You poor, tired thing!" she exclaimed. "Well, how have you got on? Did Fluffy send the cheque?"

"He's writing to-night. You'll have the letter in the morning. Frankie, I've got the money for my shares."

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"Who from?"

"Percival Hope!" And I told her all that had transpired.

She heard me in silence, a smile flickering in her eyes.

"Here are the notes, Frankie, will you keep them for me?"

"Not I, Cynthia, it's much too great a responsibility; I won't even look at them. Take my advice, and don't let those notes out of your sight until you hand them to Lord Chesterton. Put them in a safe place, and don't tell anybody where it is. You're certain Fluffy is going to write to me to-night?"

"He said so."

"Then I can sleep in peace and so can you. Casellis will have his cheque, Ella will get her sweetheart, you will pay your bets, and I"—she paused—"I shall confute Mr. Percival Hope. Good night, dearie, sleep well."

I was too excited to hope for much rest. I did not indeed fall asleep until the morning, and then my slumbers were broken by strange dreams. I fancied I heard footsteps at my door, and the handle softly, cautiously turned. In my sleep I seemed to feel somebody pulling at the bedclothes as though seeking for my notes. Half waking I thought I saw a figure glide quickly from the room. But when fully aroused I carefully examined my surroundings. I found the door fast shut as I had left it, the notes still tucked in safety under the mattress, while the gliding figure proved to be the curtain which, caught by a breeze blowing through the open window, streamed full length across the room.

I returned to bed, and undisturbed by further fancies, slept until the afternoon.

Frankie called me in time to see Chesterton; she stopped and chatted while I dressed.

"Have you seen Casellis, Frankie?"

"Yes, my dear, and thanks to you and Fluffy I have settled him. He won't trouble me any more. As for Ella, she's going to marry Jim immediately. I've made a point of it. I shall give them a wedding breakfast and pay their passage to the States. They'll sail next week."

Chesterton was very pleased to see me, and had brought some flowers and a large box of chocolates. I gave him the notes and he promised to settle with the bookmakers that very day and send me on the change.

He stayed a long time, but said nothing remarkable until the end of the interview.

Just before he left, *apropos* of nothing and with great abruptness, he remarked—"I've entered myself for the Cynthia Stakes, Miss Hamilton, but before I make the running I should like to know how the betting stands. Is it two to one on 'Hope,' or can I look for a fair field and no favour?"

"Racing terms are very hard to understand, Lord Chesterton," I answered, "but so far as I can tell, I think you might put some money on—the field."

His lordship dropped his hat and made for my hand, but I thought all things considered it was time he went, so I just managed to evade him and got clear of the room, or, as Chesterton would have said, "the course."

The next two or three days passed much as usual, men called in the morning, women some of the afternoon, and poor Toby all day. He avoided me, but was otherwise unchanged, except a sudden taste he seemed to have developed for *cognac*. Frankie took little notice of him, but so long as he was in her presence the boy appeared content.

I worried greatly over the bill Toby had signed; indeed, there were many things I had to worry over. But however sorry I was for much that had happened I was powerless to alter any of it. Frankie would go her own way, and I, from force of circumstances and affection, had to go with her.

One morning while Frankie was out driving, I was summoned to see a caller. Skinner presented his card with a perfunctory cough.

"Nathan" was the name engraved upon the pasteboard, a name to me of evil omen.

I hastened to the drawing-room, fearful lest Lady Gaveston should see and interrogate the moneylender.

"Mrs. Norton is out," I explained, "if you can leave a message I will deliver it to my cousin."

Nathan, a tall, good-looking man of quiet appearance and good address, heard me out in silence.

"I am sorry, but my business can only be done with Mrs. Norton. It is of great importance that I should see her this morning. With your permission I will wait."

He bowed and resumed his seat, leaving me in a terrible state of apprehension. Suppose Chesterton should arrive, or Kinross, or Sir John. What would they think of such a visitor? Nathan was known to most of the smart set, but purely in his professional capacity. He did not care for society, and only called on fashionable folk in connection with his business.

To find him there would signify to most people that Mrs. Norton was hard up.

I instructed Skinner not to show anybody into the drawing-room, and to let Mrs. Norton know I wanted her as soon as she returned. I took up my station in the window seat, and tried to talk unconcernedly with Mr. Nathan.

He seconded my efforts, and we passed a conversational if not a comfortable half hour.

At one o'clock Frankie returned, and swept into the room, a vision in pale grey and amber roses.

Nathan came quickly to the point.

"Some ten days back you brought me a bill, Mrs. Norton, signed by yourself and Sir Edward Ffolliot."

"Exactly"—Frankie nodded calmly. "Infamous interest you charged me, too," she added smiling. "You've not come to ask for any more?"

"My call is on a matter of business, Mrs. Norton, that is all. My partner has asked me to make inquiries in connection with Sir Edward Ffolliot. It has come within his knowledge that the baronet left England the day before the date on the bill. When did he sign, Mrs. Norton?"

"Two or three days before I called on you," said Frankie promptly. "I filled in the date after."

Nathan paused, and glanced at her significantly. With a dim sense of what was going to follow, and with an awful fear of the questions Frankie might compel me to answer, I slipped through the curtains separating the drawing from the other reception rooms, and waited out of sight, but in hearing.

"Sir Edward wanted to lend me the money himself," said Frankie. "Of course; I wouldn't hear of that, but at his own suggestion, I consented he should back the bill. He signed it here in this house. I and my cousin, the young lady whom you saw just now, were present."

"You are both prepared to swear that you saw Sir Edward sign?"

"Most certainly. I will call my cousin. Cynthia!" she cried, "Cynthia!"

But with my face hidden among the sofa cushions, my hands pressed tight to my ears, I remained deaf to the summons.

Nothing should make me swear to such a thing, nothing; and yet if Frankie were in danger, if she should be involved, what could I do?

I waited in sickening anticipation. It was one of the most awful moments of my life.

When I lifted my head Nathan was speaking.

"I will tell my partner what you say, Mrs. Norton. Doubtless he will accept the explanation. But remember the bill falls due in little over a month, and under *no circumstances whatever* shall we renew it."

Frankie made some laughing answer, but the money lender did not respond to her lightness of mood.

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"Frankie," I gasped, when he had disappeared, "how *could* you say such things?"

My cousin turned upon me wrathfully.

"Because I prefer to run any risk rather than let in my friends," she said. "If I had not said what I did Toby must have been involved. I will make any sacrifice rather than that should happen."

She looked quite beautiful as she spoke, and very heroic. I felt abashed—almost mean, without exactly knowing why.

Shortly after this Lord Kinross and his sister returned to town. And then there came the day—never by me to be forgotten—when Percival Hope had declared he would prove Frankie an adventuress.

He and Kinross arrived within a few minutes of each other, about three o'clock in the afternoon. Frankie and I went down to receive them. Lady Gaveston had gone to a flower show, and Skinner had received instructions that we were not at home to any casual callers.

Kinross looked somewhat grave, and seemed more than a little anxious. He shook hands eagerly with Frankie, and smiled pleasantly at me. Frankie nodded carelessly to Percival, who returned the salutation with a ceremonious bow.

"Mrs. Norton," said Kinross, with a touch of nervousness, "I have to ask your pardon for what I am going to say. My cousin Percival is here this afternoon on a peculiar errand. He wants to tell me certain things he has heard about you, but I decline to listen, save in your presence. Only on that condition will I hear him—now or ever. It remains for you to say whether or no Percival shall speak."

For a moment she faced them in silence. It was the crisis of her life, and even her indomitable courage and strong will quailed before it. If she refused to hear Hope, danger for the moment was over. But, and she realised it to the full, all chance of securing Kinross would end. He would leave her, never to return.

Her face went a shade paler, but her voice was steady as ever when she answered:

"I am glad to have the opportunity of hearing what Mr. Hope has to bring against me, and disproving it."

"Thank you," said Kinross softly, and stooping, kissed her hand.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing with me a person of the name of Casellis," said Percival, "I left him in the hall. With your permission, Mrs. Norton, I will call him in."

Frankie bowed, and Hope, marching to the door, summoned Casellis to enter. At the best he was an unpleasing-looking person, and on that afternoon he struck me as looking more than ever ill-favoured. He sat, or rather crouched, on the edge of a chair, blinking with narrow, half-closed eyes.

To this hour I cannot say whether or no Frankie was prepared for him; to this hour I cannot say whether or no he came determined, despite her heavy bribe, to sell her at the final moment.

Whatever her thoughts or his, their faces did not betray them.

"I gather that Mrs. Norton informed you that she was the widow of Richard Norton, who died some two years ago of malaria," said Percival to Kinross. "Furthermore, that with the assistance of Mr. Thomson she sold her late husband's estate to a company, and came to England on the proceeds."

"Quite so," said Kinross.

Percival paused.

"That man," he said at last, pointing to Casellis, "was employed as a clerk by Mr. Richard Norton. He tells me that his late employer did not die from malaria. His death was surrounded by most suspicious circumstances. It was believed in the island that he died from poison—you said this?" he asked Casellis abruptly.

"I did," said the man from Jamaica.

"Casellis further states that he overheard Mrs. Norton in conversation with"—Hope paused—"with a man whose name I will not at present mention. Mrs. Norton alluded to the rumours current as to the cause of her husband's death, and begged her companion to take steps to get rid of the body, and so avoid a threatened exhumation and inquiry. Shortly after Mr. Norton's grave was found to have been disturbed, the coffin opened, and empty. This outrage was put down to the natives, who, it was said, had a grudge against Mr. Norton. As a matter of fact, that gentleman was extremely popular with the natives. Furthermore, far from playing the part of a devoted wife, Mrs. Norton's extravagance practically ruined her husband. He signed bills to raise money for her jaunts to Paris, to meet which he had to mortgage the plantation to its full value. I may mention that the estate is not in the possession of a company, but at the present moment is devastated and deserted, save for a few wretched blacks. You are prepared to swear to all this?" he turned to Casellis, "as you have already sworn to me."

Casellis stood up, and gazed slowly round the room. Frankie, pale as death, looked straight at him, and her lips moved. A malignant smile twitched his mouth, he seemed to enjoy her terror.

Then a swift and sudden change came over him. Some thought, some memory, laid hold of him. He drew himself up, threw back his head. A light came in his eyes, a smile to his lips. He was transformed. No longer cringing, abject, he stood erect—a man, keen, alert, sinewy, lithe. So might he have looked years back, when to her island home Frankie first came. He was a half caste, quick to love, quicker to hate. What if it were revenge that prompted him to speak, revenge for all that he had suffered for the love of that proud, fair woman, who now so scornfully defied him?

Frankie's eyes still fixed on his, grew luminous, tender; a shadow of regret, reproach, stole into them. They filled with tears.

At the sight Casellis started, fell back as from a blow.

"I swore to it—yes," he cried, in a harsh voice; "but I swore falsely. I am guilty if you will, but she—she is innocent as Heaven!"

[*What happens next will be told next Tuesday.*]

She Objected to Exaggerations.

GUSHLEY: "Would you think of me if I were ten thousand leagues away?" His *Fiancée* (from College): "As the maximum diameter of the earth is only eight thousand miles, Claronce, your supposition is an impossible one."

She was Quite Proper.

"ELLA, you have been playing all the afternoon with these toy soldiers. That's not a proper amusement for a big girl like you," said her mother. "But, mamma, I was not playing with the soldiers. I picked out the officers and played with them."

The Modern Way.

SHE (as he finishes mending her tyre): "Oh, thank you so much. What should I have done without you?" He: "Don't mention it. I wish I could always carry the repair kit for you." Tenderly: "May I, Eleanor?" And the two bicycles continued to lean against the grassy bank.

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Foretelling the Future.

Blushing Bride: "I want to get a present for my husband, but I hardly know what to buy." Clerk: "Why not get one of these nice silk mufflers to wear during the evening?" Bride: "Oh, dear, no; my husband never goes out at night." Clerk: "Well, you might get it for next year. He will then."

Same Thing.

Wife: "And did Mr. Gay really say I was positively dove-like?" Husband: "Something of that sort. He said you were pigeon-toed, I believe."

Nearer the Mark.

The Clumsy Man (coming from the ball-room): "How can I repay you for that waltz?" She (whose train has suffered): "Oh, don't pay me; settle with my dressmaker."

A Mean Revenge.

"I've got even with Blimmins at last," said the Society reporter. "How?" "You know how jealous his wife is? Well, I have alluded to him as 'a great favourite among the ladies.'"

Quite Another Matter.

Old Boy: "Thomas, if my wife asks you where I am, tell her I have gone to the office." Servant: "Certainly, sir! But where are you really going in case anyone else should want to know?"

Excellent Advice.

Pompous Author (to veteran Editor): "What would you advise a man to do whose ideas are in advance of the times?" Veteran Editor (promptly): "I would advise him to sit quietly down and wait for the times to catch up."

The Badge of Poverty.

Mrs. de Rich: "The *Society Chitchat* is edited by a woman, isn't it?" Mr. de Rich: "So I've heard." Mrs. de Rich: "I should say she wasn't making much money out of it. She says 'a lavish display of diamonds is vulgar.'"

Extremely Awkward.

Blanche: "Isabel, what has put you in such a bad humour?" Isabel: "Why, I've just had a communication from Jack, and he writes such a horrid hand that I can't tell whether it is a proposal, an ode to Autumn, or that cure for chilblains he promised to send me."

Quite Correct.

Mrs. Youngwife: "You know those lovely thirty-shilling dining-room gongs we saw the other day? Well, to-day they were marked down to 12s. 6d. each, so I got three." Her Husband; "What did you get three for?" Mrs. Youngwife (sweetly): "Why, one for each meal, of course."

What Papa Said.

"George, dear," said the girl, "do you ever drink anything?" "Yes, occasionally," George reluctantly admitted. "But, dear," she went on anxiously, "what do you suppose papa would say if he should discover that the future husband of his only daughter drank?" "He discovered it this morning." "Oh, George, and what did he say?" "He said, 'Well, George, my boy, I don't care if I do.'"

No Joke There.

Mrs. Smith (who is reading a humorous paper): "I don't see any fun in these jokes about bigs bills for ladies' hats." Mr. Smith (with feeling): "I don't either."

The Blessings of Knowledge.

Little Girl: "Mamma says I must study grammar this term." Little Boy: "What's that for?" Little Girl: "That's so I can laugh when folks make mistakes."

Two Points of View.

Wife: "How people gaze at my new dress. I presume they wonder if I've been shopping in Paris." Husband: "More likely they wonder if I've been robbing a bank."

Liked Her Cheek.

Maud: "Did George kiss you last night when he left?" Ethel: "Certainly he did not; why do you ask?" Maud: "Nothing; only he just told me that he liked your cheek."

When the Sermon Doesn't Act.

When a man's collar gets unbuttoned in church and begins to climb up the back of his neck he might as well get up and go out; the sermon will not do him much good.

That Dreadful Father-in-Law.

Her Young Man: "I—I—I, sir, would like——" Her Father: "Well, what is it, young man? What have you got in your mouth?" Her Young Man: "I—I'm afraid it's my heart, sir."

But it Didn't Work.

Briggs: "Just for a joke, I told Miss Elderly the other day that when she laughed it was all I could do not to kiss her." Griggs: "What happened?" Briggs: "The next time I saw her she had hysterics."

A Complication.

"What's the matter, Parker? You look blue." "I am. I asked Miss Morrison to be my wife." "Ah! Rejected?" "No. Referred me to her mother, and—well, her mother rejected me herself last September."

The Retort Courteous.

Mabel: "Yes, I give you my hand with my heart in it." Jack: "You cannot do that." Mabel: "Why not?" Jack: "Your hand is too dainty and small to hold such a large heart." That made the engagement irrevocable.

A Long Wait.

Child: "Grandpa, how old are you?" Grandpa: "I am eighty-seven years old, my little dear." Child: "Then you was born eighty years before I was." Grandpa: "Yes, my little girl." Child: "Law, what a long time you had to wait for me!"

Squeezed Through It.

Mabel (to young bride who has just returned from her wedding trip): "But were you not frightened, Marion, dear, going through that awful tunnel?" Young Bride: "I should have been dreadfully without Charlie, but with him I managed to squeeze through it."

Songs and Songs.

Petted Bride: "Here is the bill for that fur cloak I told you about. It's lovely." Indulgent Husband (looking at bill): "Great Scott! You said you could get that cloak for a mere song." "So I did." "Do you mean to say that amount represents a mere song?" "Yes, a Patti song."

A Reasonable Request.

Husband: "My dear, I want to ask you one favour before you go off on that long visit." Wife: "A thousand, my love. What is it?" "Don't try to put the house in order before you leave." "It isn't hard work." "Perhaps not; but think of the expense of telegraphing to you every time I want to find anything."

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A Book-worm's Love Story.

In the British Museum Reading Room

DAY after day, for some months, I had sat in near company of a young girl, who, without being beautiful, was the possessor of infinite charm. Whether she worked so energetically for the mere love of the thing or from necessity I could not tell. I chose, however, to fancy her the help of a widowed mother who on slender means had perhaps still younger lives than my fellow-worker's to give her anxieties. Suffice it to say, on this point, my near fellow-worker laboured with zest, and often her example inspired my own somewhat flagging efforts. I found myself possessed of an unconquerable desire to make her acquaintance, yet I could not summon the necessary courage to address her. I have known many pleasant ties of friendship which had their origin in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

I am not going to give a glowing description of the "infinite charm" already referred to, much preferring to remain possessed alone of a fact, the remembrance of which adds a degree of extra pleasure when I indulge in retrospect.

On many occasions, while endeavouring to bring my wool-gathering brains into a state approximate to order, I had remarked troublous expressions spread over her intelligent face, as though some difficulty beset her in her work, and thought came to me to offer assistance, but my nerve always failed me. My triumph came later, away from "musty tome" and "giant dome." Such an opportunity as I could not let slip.

A cold but bright day in January of a certain year in the recently dead century, found me on my way to interview a notable member of Parliament, with the hope to secure through his aid a ticket for the House of Commons, where an important debate was on, and I was desirous to hear the "immaculate Joe," and then—well, not die, exactly, but feel myself acquaint wi' him.

I had proceeded as far as the top of Charing Cross Road, when I bethought me to take a 'bus. I became an "inside." There was but one other occupant—a lady—whose face was turned towards the front window of the vehicle. She appeared to be on the look-out for someone coming from the direction in which we were travelling.

Presently the conductor's voice startled us both, the lady turning about revealed to me the well-known face of "my lady" of the Reading Room.

The conductor's call upon us for "Fares, please!" together with the suddenness of my recognition, had rather flustered me. I began fumbling in my coat pocket for the needful copper coin, and was sensible enough to notice that the lady was doing likewise—not in my pockets, but her own—for her purse. Presently a vivid blush spread over her face, as she plaintively gave the conductor to understand she had left her purse and money at home.

The collector of fares—bless his ignorant and unappreciative vulgarity—was somewhat inclined to be coarse and inoffensive, as he remarked:

"Ho, I dessay! that's a tale wot ain't good enough for me. I've bin 'ad that way afore to-day. Wot are yer goin' to do?"

At this juncture I deemed it advisable to expostulate with the ruffian, warning him that it was no part of his duty to be uncivil. As I am somewhat herculean in build, my words had the desired effect. Then I begged the lady's permission to settle so trifling a matter, at the same time pointing out to her that the fact of our being fellow-workers at the British Museum would at least privilege me in so small a service. This announcement reassured her of the perfect propriety of the thing for she at once replied:

"That is fortunate. Thank you so much. May I ask your name?"

I gave it. "Richard Athelstane."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Athelstane. I am Eunice Frith."

After delivering herself of this gracious bit of information she departed on her way, leaving me in a seventh heaven of delight. For was not the ice now broken?

In the matter of years I am no longer a fledgling, and I have never been overburdened by the weight of worldly goods. This latter fact, no doubt, has been a main factor in keeping me from straying into pastures beyond those wherein I cropped my week to week end needs.

At the period of my first interest in Eunice Frith I was busily engaged in efforts to graft in some manner the American family of Shoddee upon the parent stock in England. It was a work of great wearisomeness, inasmuch as without the license used by the average genealogist, I had begun to experience considerable doubts as to whether the millionaire mill-owner from the other side of the herring-pond would respond so heartily as I could have wished to my views as to what a "reasonable and just" honorarium should be.

On the next occasion of my meeting with Miss Frith the merest form of greeting followed. As she handed me the bronze coin which annulled her self-conceived obligation, her renewal of thanks was accompanied by the faintest change of colour, but her words, "You were very kind to help me out of my dilemma" left no opening for extension of an acquaintance so auspiciously begun. Our sittings were within one of each other. We took them, and thus far there was the end. She evidently knew full well the existence of the rule of "silence" which the superintendent for the time ever strives so energetically to enforce, but which the many officials themselves do not consider it worth while to act up to. For it is noticeable that whenever Lord Bluffe or Sir John Bounder have occasion to visit the room they are far too important for the official cicerone to venture to check in their thoughtless loud-spokenness.

Eunice Frith, whether or no she divined that I desired a closer acquaintance, never bargained for the catastrophe, which though it brought fear and trembling for awhile to her, won for me the "Open Sesame" I had so longed for

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Having occasion to turn to a somewhat unwieldy volume, from which she was proceeding to make extracts, she had, in ignorance of rules, taken an ink-glass from its stand, for handiness' sake; a reader hurrying by her seat—a corner one—caught the edge of the volume, jerking it sufficiently to overset the ink-glass. The face of the volume at once presented a map-like appearance, where oceans and rivers seemed to be like empires on their westward march. Such a contretemps is calculated to stir the most phlegmatic of readers, but to the fluttering, bird-like Eunice Frith it was a veritable cataclysm. In her distress she turned her eyes around as if to see if the executioner were at hand. Those somewhat sad-looking eyes seemed to me full of woe. The opportunity was not to be lost. Jumping up, I went to her aid, and with sundry wisps of blotting-paper from a neighbouring pad remedied the mischief as well and quickly as possible, the disfiguring distilment not having had sufficient time to soak in and render the printing matter illegible.

She never forgot my prompt action in this matter. In a week's time we were on speaking terms, within a month an acquaintanceship had ripened marvellously. Gradually we came to understand each other. We sat side by side, the dividing chair separated us no longer.

It was all very nice, and, to use an Americanism, I felt "real good."

Then the time came when she assented to my invitation to drink tea with me in the gallery room. Over that delicious Souchong we chatted freely. She spoke to me of her mother—an invalid; of her brother—a clerk in a banking house. I gathered that the united earnings of these young people represented nearly the whole of the wherewithal of their otherwise happy little home. I know there are many similar cases. That is so, but, believe me, there could be but one Eunice Frith.

My work of pedigree-creating had palled sadly upon me for some time, and I began to think living among the bones—so to speak—of departed nobodies, far from exhilarating.

Once it happened Eunice's mother accompanied her to the establishment in Bloomsbury—the British Museum. As they were descending the stairway from the galleries, I was passing through the hall. Eunice introduced me to her mother, and we remained in conversation for the best part of an hour, when Mrs. Frith suddenly remembered her doctor's instructions not to "try herself too much," and pronounced for home. To her alarm, on our arrival at the vestibule of the Museum, it was raining smartly. Once again luck favoured me. My umbrella, a property which nine days out of ten I left at home, proved a ready friend for once. Under its shelter Mrs. Frith reached her 'bus in comparative dryness. As it looked as if the downpour would be continuous, I insisted she should retain it.

"Oh, no, Mr. Athelstane, I won't deprive you."

But my insistence carried the day, and suggested that Eunice might find it useful in the morning. That young lady, however, declared she "had one of her own."

Mrs. Frith settled the question by saying—

"I will take it, Mr. Athelstane, on condition that you will bring Eunice home this evening, and join us at our little tea-dinner, and then, you see, you can take possession of your umbrella."

To this I consented with covert rapture.

A Chapter of Accidents.

After leaving Eunice and her mother, I returned to the Reading Room, intending to put in an hour or two of work, but in this I was frustrated, by the receipt of a telegram, which announced the serious illness of my father and desired my early attendance at his side.

Here was a call that brooked no inattention. I showed the wire to Eunice, and begged her to express to her mother my regrets, and bidding her what was intended to be an impressive "Good-bye," left for my home at Wells, in Norfolk.

Little did I think that two long years would elapse before I again set eyes on Eunice Frith.

I was away in Norfolk for some three months, my father's condition varying to such an extent, owing to frequent relapses, as left me no alternative but to stay with him. I was his second son, my brother Christopher being two years my senior; our mother had been dead many years.

Christopher, somewhere about the early seventies, had shipped himself off to South Africa to seek fortune on the diamond diggings of the Vaal River. That good luck had been attendant upon him we had every reason to believe, but to what extent had nothing tangible to help us to an idea. His letters had been few and far between, neither lengthy nor graphic, but warm enough to show us that fraternal affection still existed in his breast, though perhaps in a very limited form.

My father had been dead some six weeks, during which period I had been busying myself in the administration of his little estate and winding up my enforced rest from pedigree-hunting and other such trifles, when the great change in my life began. The African mail brought me a letter from my brother Christopher, or rather from a friend of his, acting as amanuensis. Christopher had met with a very serious accident in the mine. Most of his ribs had been broken, and the doctors feared that much internal laceration had also taken place. Chris was anxious to see me, fearing a fatal ending. Would I come at once to Kimberley? He had also inclosed a draft for £100 to cover travelling expenses, and in case the world had not used me kindly. I was not to let the "old man" know of the accident, and suggested all sorts of other precautions.

To pack up my traps was but short work, and the old home I left in charge of a maiden aunt.

After I had booked my passage, I had a few hours to spare. These I spent in a vain search for Eunice Frith. I could hear no tidings at the house where they had lived. The landlady only knew they had left—gone, she thought, into "unfurnished" rooms.

I did not feel easy on the matter, but I hoped for the best, and made my way to a hotel near Waterloo whence I had to start the next morning on my first venture beyond the white cliffs of old England.

The Castle liner on which I had taken my passage did her voyage well and rapidly. The succeeding day to that on which I landed in Cape Town saw me being transferred, as rapidly as a South African Railway can manage it, northwards. In less than forty-eight hours from my start from the Cape, I knew I had arrived too late. Poor Chris had gone to the bourne whence none return.

His lawyer interviewed me soon after my arrival, condoled with me, and eulogised poor Chris' many virtues. He said that my brother had been a most successful man up to a certain point. But lately owing to—to—er—scruples, he had been placed at a disadvantage. Still, he remarked,

"Still, Mr. Athelstane, your brother died pretty *warm*. His personalty, I should say—well—let me see—er, well—is quite seventy thousand pounds."

I explained that my brother had never confided either to his father or myself the degree of success which he had attained.

"Indeed, sir," I added, "we know very little about his South African career. I presume he has a wife and—children?"

"Not so, sir. Your brother lived a very retired life, rarely joining in any of the many functions our citizens delight in. He was a good man, and a charitable one."

"Charitable?" I questioned. "Then I presume he has left large sums to your local institutions and hospitals."

"No, sir, not a penny."

"Then to whom does his money revert? Surely he did not die intestate?"

"Not a man in the world less likely to do so. No, sir, you are the happy man. By will—here it is, sir, in black and white—'all that I die possessed of I leave to my brother Richard Athelstane to be by him used and disposed of as may appear best to his own good and charitable disposition.'"

I was not inordinately puffed up by this sudden acquisition of wealth. One thing flashed first upon my mind, and that was that I should be for ever done with my old occupations. No

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more grinding out paragraphs, no more pulling about the dead and gone ancestors of mighty present-day pork butchers.

No more of ill-ventilated reading-rooms, whether under red-tape rule or otherwise. I should live in Utopia. To do this, I deemed it wisest and best to return to England. In due course, I arrived in London, and at once went back to the scene of my old struggles, the British Museum. It seemed as if I could not keep away. "Why did I go there?" you ask. To look for Eunice, or, maybe, get some news of her. But no, I could learn nothing; and it came into my mind that I had seen the last of Eunice Frith.

I had been home a month. Most of my time had been spent at my little place in Norfolk; still even there I had a restless feeling, as of some unaccomplished work to be looked after. What it was I could not divine. Then I betook myself to town again.

I had been one evening to King's Cross station to inquire after a package I had transmitted, but of which I had since received no acknowledgment. I made a short cut back in the direction of Russell Square, when my attention was drawn to a knot of children on the pavement. At first I could see nothing, but as I drew near I noticed one or two articles of furniture with a box or two corded over.

"One of those hateful cases of distraint—some poor lone, aged widow," I thought to myself. Even as I looked, a poor, worn woman, yet neat and tidy withal, looked up, her face by its pained expression telling a tale of woe. Where had I seen that face before? I had not gone on my way many steps before my recollection cleared. I hastened back to the forlorn creature, and pushing my way to her side, asked in an undertone:

"Are you not Mrs. Frith—Eunice's mother?"

"Yes, oh, yes! But you—who are you?"

Before I could make reply, another figure appeared on the scene. Eunice herself—but, great Heavens! how changed that face had become. In its thinness and wanness even the mother's sank into nothingness, as in heart-rending tones she gasped—

"O, mother, mother! have they turned you out like this? I came as soon as I knew the state of affairs."

Then she caught sight of me, knew me at once, as I could see, and drew shyly back.

I held out my hand to her, saying—

"You know me, Miss Frith. You are in trouble. Your mother cannot remain here, you must come with me."

Just then a heaven-sent growler, drawn by a horse which, positively, had four legs, and, what is more, could use them, appeared. I hailed the driver. He proved a smart man. In the twinkling of the dog-star's eye, I had put Mrs. Frith and her daughter inside, and jumping on the box told cabby to drive to King's Cross station.

In one of the waiting-rooms I heard the painful story my friends had to tell. Eunice's brother had lapsed from the direct course. In their endeavours to rescue him, their small capital of hardly-earned savings had melted like snow before the sun. Remorse so affected the brother's mind that to escape moral suffering he put an end to his life. Why is it the young are so forgetful of the sufferings of the old? However, affairs went from bad to worse, till Eunice by overwork broke her health, and went into hospital. The poor old lady hung on as long as she could, until an inexorable landlord called in the assistance of a bailiff.

A new home was soon found for them. Money *can* do that. I begged them to let me be their banker until such time as Eunice's health was completely restored. Their common sense was equal to the occasion, and they showed it by accepting my offer. A month's perfect rest in town, another at the seaside, soon mended the health of these broken ones, more than ever dear to me. My old home in Norfolk forms a peaceful haven of rest for Mrs. Frith. At present Eunice is with her. No longer does she run danger of damaging the volumes in the Reading Room at the British Museum. I do not intend she ever shall, for next week I am going down to Norfolk. If I am lucky, there will be a bridal ceremony in the village church before I return to town.

F. Eliot.

Your Editor Chats.

The chief item of interest this week—to me, at all events—is the increasing enthusiasm of readers concerning "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."

For example, ADA expresses the hope that Frankie comes to a bad end. She likes "Fluffy," and thinks Kinross good fun. Percival Hope she regards as "a darling," and supposes that Cynthia marries him. Although ADA, to use her own expression, "is only a school-girl herself," she thinks she would have seen through Frankie sooner than Cynthia did.

Another correspondent, JOSEPHINE, does not seem to have much of an opinion of Cynthia as a woman. She says: "I am interested in her and, indeed, up to a certain point, feel sorry for her, but I cannot help thinking she is much to blame. She should have refused to have even faintly allied herself with Mrs. Norton's schemes. Please do not think me hard, but I am convinced that Cynthia could have retarded, if not stopped, Mrs. Norton's downward career if she had only been true to her principles."

Now, to deal with ADA first. I am sorry that I cannot very well arrange matters to meet her views, for the articles are true to life, and the young lady who has written them has simply stated plain facts. No doubt they could be made more exciting if romance were introduced; but I think you will agree with me that if this were done the whole idea of the series would be spoilt. Of course it is easy for the reader to see through Mrs. Norton and her ways, but, at the time, it was practically impossible for Cynthia to discover her true character. If this adventuress hoodwinked clever men like those whose names appear as Kinross and Sir John Strickland, how much more easy must it have been to hoodwink a simple girl like Cynthia Hamilton? I consider these articles are most cleverly written, for the reason that the little lady's companion, who is responsible for them, has treated them in such a way as to show the persons dealt with in their true light, without being influenced by after events.

JOSEPHINE'S criticisms are, perhaps, justifiable in a certain measure, but it is one thing to know for certain that Mrs. Norton was an adventuress (as JOSEPHINE now knows) and quite another thing for Cynthia to prove that fact to herself at the time when the incidents recorded were actually happening. Cynthia was just an ordinary simple-minded girl; Mrs. Norton was a woman of strong passions, a quick thinker, and a great schemer. Cynthia was passionately fond of Mrs. Norton, and convinced herself against her suspicions that nothing radically wrong was going on. Moreover, she was practically under the influence of this woman, and did not care to question her actions to any great extent. Had Cynthia been very strong-minded, she would, of course, have had a row with Mrs. Norton in the early stages of her position as companion, and then, not only would she have left, but "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" would never have been written!

Finally, a man—"A. H. C."—writes: "In the capital series which you are running—'THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA'—there is given this week a very vivid description of Derby Day. I have a bet on the subject that this was written by a man. Every line of it suggests the masculine experience rather than the feminine intuition. Am I right? Have I won my bet?" Alas! "A. H. C.," you are wrong! The whole of the articles have been written by the young lady whose name is given as "Cynthia Hamilton," and, on showing her your letter, she said that she thought that it was quite a feather in her cap that anyone should have regarded her description of the Derby as the work of a man!

Your Editor.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther.

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

The rumour proves to be true. Alec had indeed managed to escape from the prison, and taking a boat had pulled down the river, after purloining some sailors' clothes from an empty barge. Just when he is thoroughly exhausted, however, he is run down by a sailing barge. His boat is smashed, but Alec is rescued and taken on board. The barge proves to be the *Mary Ann*, bound for Gurlston Bay. Arrived at its destination, it is hardly moored to the pier before Esther, who is taking a walk, arrives at the pier to watch the unloading.

Shortly afterwards Revelle saunters up, when suddenly Esther catches sight of Alec in the barge. With great presence of mind she leads Revelle away from the spot before he discovers whom she has seen. Late that night, after everyone has gone to bed, Esther contrives a meeting with Alec in the drawing-room of the house in which she is staying. The two lovers are clasped in each other's arms when a man's footsteps are suddenly heard outside the door, and a minute after Revelle rushes into the room. He passes Esther without seeing her, and gives chase to Scarsdale. Shortly afterwards he returns with a sprained ankle; he has missed his man.

Crump now decides to burglarously enter Revelle's house at Warham and search Revelle's belongings. Aided by his nephew, Police-constable Wilton, who engages the butler's attention, Crump gets into Revelle's dressing-room and begins his search. Suddenly he discovers a portmanteau with a false bottom.

SIGNOR BALDERINI'S LETTERS.

CRUMP'S patience looked like being rewarded. Quickly, yet methodically, he emptied the trunk of its contents. It did not take him long to find out the secret of the false bottom. A slight lump in one of the sides proved to be a spring. Pressure upon it caused the flap to fly up.

"Now," said the little man, "we shall see what we shall see!"

He first turned his attention to a couple of wigs that lay in the recess, one grey-coloured, the other a dark auburn. He examined their insides, and having noted the name of their maker, produced pencil and paper, and jotted something down. A flat tin box was the next object examined. It contained a number of grease-paints, some crêpe hair in various colours, and a small bottle of spirit gum.

"Quite a theatrical outfit!" said the little man to himself, "This is interesting, and suggests disguises to me rather than amateur theatricals. It admits of speculation on the past, and suggests possibilities in the future; but it does not throw any light on the two matters that are uppermost in my mind."

Next he picked up what looked like a scroll of paper. It was discoloured with age. He unrolled it.

"Ah, indeed! This, again, is interesting, quite interesting! Dear me! Signor Balderini!"

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The paper, unrolled, had proved to be a small picture-poster representing a man in tights and spangles in the act of making a descent through mid-air, holding on to a parachute with one hand, in the other a lighted cigar. Beneath the picture the announcement in German, that at a certain date and at a certain place, the famous Signor Balderini would make a parachute descent. The poster was more than ten years old. Crump knew sufficient German to translate the letter-press.

For some three minutes Crump was busily employed scribbling on his piece of paper.

"H'm!" he muttered, "I have been able to trace Mr. Seaton Revelle's life back for the last ten years, then a blank wall confronted me. But now I wonder if I am jumping at a rash conclusion in venturing to believe that prior to that time there was no Mr. Revelle, but rather Signor Balderini? Does Seaton Revelle, the gentleman amateur balloonist, represent the apotheosis of Signor Balderini, the professional parachutist. It is curious, too, how this picture fits those words spoken by poor Vance, that early morning by the reservoir. 'Don't you hear the crowd cheering—cheering Jim! Only holding on with one hand, his cigar in the other, cool as brass, that's Jim!'".

Crump was reasoning as calmly and as deliberately as if he had been comfortably seated in his armchair at Woodbine Cottage, instead of being engaged upon an unlawful operation. There was absolutely no signs of flurry about the little man.

"Thanks," he went on, "to the date and names on the poster, there should be no difficulty in finding out all about the Signor, though this descent must have taken place more than ten years ago. Will investigation, I wonder, reveal the fact that the Signor's Christian name was James or the foreign equivalent? That, some ten years ago, he was supposed to have met his death by drowning? And was he married at the time? And to whom?"

The little man carefully rolled up the poster again and replaced it in the trunk. On his strip of paper he had scribbled down, amongst other things, the name of the printer.

"And if—allowing myself for once to jump headlong at a number of conclusions—I could obtain proof that the Signor and Mr. Revelle are one and the same, and that the Signor was a married man, and that his wife, believing him to be dead, entered into domestic service under the name of Vance—would not this constitute another link in the chain of circumstantial evidence that I am endeavouring to forge. If this poor creature was murdered, it will be very essential to be able to point to a motive. Miss Mansfield, God bless her! can prove that Mr. Revelle made a proposal of marriage to her, and at that time poor Vance was living. But a truce to conclusions!"

He dived a hand down into the trunk and brought up a bundle of letters bound together by a faded ribbon.

"Two games of 'a hundred up' should give me plenty of time!"

He untied the ribbon and glanced at the first letter. He gave a low whistle when he caught sight of the signature at the end. It was that of a married lady, occupying a high position in Society. In the second letter the surname was dropped.

"Oh, you vile scoundrel!" whispered Crump, the last letter read, "so this has been one of your sources of income—blackmail! And a woman, too!"

A second bundle of letters revealed another case of the same kind.

"You infamous blackguard, you!"

Then, a moment later—

"Hullo! This letter has got in here by mistake!"

It was written in a woman's hand, but different from the others. And the date proved it to be much older. Crump's eyes brightened; he screwed up his mouth.

"Dearest Jim," it ran, "to-morrow! I feel afraid, miserable, yet happy! You can perhaps understand. To-morrow we shall be husband and wife, and Alice Vince will be Mrs. James Balder. Oh, Jim, I am blushing as I write this. And yet I can't help feeling miserable. The dear old dad is sitting in the chimney corner, smoking his pipe, mother is peacefully knitting. I can't help crying a little. What will they say when they find me gone? It seems so wicked to deceive them. Oh, Jim, you will have to love me ever so much to make up for the love that I am leaving behind me. But they have always been against you, and I daren't tell them; but perhaps, when we are married, they will forgive us, knowing that it is too late to undo what is done, and it will all come right in the end. And when I think this, I don't feel quite so miserable at the thought of leaving them.

"Good-night, dearest Jim! This will reach you only a little time before I shall. Yours, most lovingly, ALICE."

Crump's expression was one of sadness and sternness mixed, as he folded up the letter and put it away in a pocket.

"I must certainly steal this. Jim Balder—Signor Balderini Alice Vince—Alice Vince—professional parachutist—amateur balloonist! A most pathetic letter, that, to me—the first act of the tragedy!"

He read through the other letters, then tied them up again, and replaced them in the trunk.

"With regard to the mystery of the reservoir I have made some little headway, but, in the other matter, I am afraid that I am no forrader. I had hoped, but no matter!"

He had exhausted the contents of the secret recess, but had encountered nothing to throw light on the manner in which the diamonds stolen from John Mansfield's safe had been disposed of. It was a disappointment to him. He started to replace the contents of the trunk, mostly clothes, taking care to search the pockets of each garment. He was essentially thorough in his methods, but his thoroughness was not to be rewarded on this occasion. He had closed down the lid of the trunk, and had just locked it again by the aid of one of the skeleton keys, one time property of Cully Scott, alias the Smasher, when a sound caught his ears—the sound of someone whistling. It was very faint, but he was just able to distinguish the air—"The Honeysuckle and the Bee!" It was the tune that he had arranged that Fred Wilton should whistle when he and Tomlinson passed to the billiard-room.

The little man sprang to his feet. The tune was no longer being whistled, but being sung in a hilarious voice that was not, however, free from an underlying note of strain.

Crump had realised. The unexpected must have happened. The handle of the door of the bedroom beyond was being turned. There was no way out of the dressing-room but through the bedroom. Crump was caught like a rat in a trap. One comprehensive glance round, then having turned out the light, he sprang to a cupboard filled with wearing apparel, that he had already examined. He crept in and drew to the door even as the door of the room beyond opened.

Railton, followed by Fred Wilton, the latter looking exceedingly uncomfortable, entered. Railton lighted the gas.

"But look here," expostulated Fred, "that was a most excellent cigar you gave me in the billiard-room. Nobody could wish for a better!"

"But I insist!" answered Railton in his suave voice, "The cigar that I'm about to offer you is of a far superior brand. It is quite the finest that it has been my lot to smoke. We keep them in the dressing-room. You want to treat your cigar as carefully as you do your wine. They are at present in a superb condition."

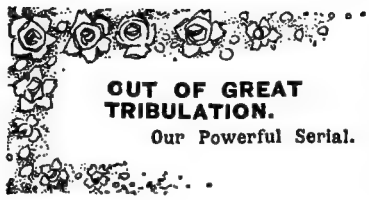
The cigars in question belonged to his master. Fred Wilton was suffering silent agony; yet he was powerless. The perspiration was beading out on his forehead when Railton passed into the dressing-room and lighted the gas.

"This," explained Railton, "is the governor's dressing-room."

Fred Wilton's heart was in his mouth. There was no sign of his uncle, but he felt positive that he must be concealed in one of the two rooms.

"This cupboard," said Railton, "is admirably suited for keeping and getting cigars into good condition. The hot water pipe running at the top insures a nice warm temperature. If you wished to purchase such a cigar as the one I am about to offer you it would cost you three shillings at least."

He pointed to a cupboard—the one in which Crump had taken refuge. Every word had been audible to the little man. He was absolutely self-possessed. The cupboard was a roomy



one, and admitted of a certain amount of movement. Quickly he took down a garment from one of the pegs. It happened to be a frock-coat. He was in an exceedingly awkward predicament, but he was full of resource, and he did not despair of extricating himself. The cigars were on the shelf above his head. There was not sufficient depth to the cupboard to enable him to conceal himself completely behind the clothes.

Railton opened the cupboard. A cry of terror, shrill as a woman's, burst from him. He had caught sight of the lower half of a man's body, the upper part shrouded by some dark garment. He was an arrant coward, Railton, and his master was quite correct in telling Benny that his nerve was absolutely gone.

Before he could step back, Crump had sprung, and had wrapped the frock-coat round Railton's head. It was a masterly manœuvre and beautifully executed; then, with a natty back-trip, he sent him flying backwards, still hopelessly enveloped in the coat.

Fred Wilton was standing motionless and open-mouthed. Crump sprang upon him with a hoarse, blood-curdling cry!

"Out o' my way, or I'll do fur yer!"

Then, instead of dealing him a murderous blow, he gave him a gentle shove, and with a jerk of his thumb indicated Railton as he lay on the floor, screaming and tearing frantically at the coat that still hooded him most effectually. Fred had recovered his self-possession. He understood. It was all over in far less time than it takes to describe. With a cry as if he had been struck a severe blow, the young constable reeled back and fell heavily on the top of Railton.

"Murder!" howled Railton.

The light went out. Then Fred winced from real pain. Railton had succeeded in getting free his hand, and, mad with terror, had fastened his teeth into the young constable's wrist.

Crump had gained the grounds. He was panting a little; but he was also grinning. That young rascal Fred had thoroughly entered into the spirit of the thing. His promptitude to grasp the situation and act augured well for his future career.

"To forget my boots," thought the little man as, silently and with a speed that would have done credit to a young man of twenty, he darted away, "would be an act of criminal folly. I can rely on Fred to keep my old friend Tomlinson very busy for the next ten minutes or so. But it was indeed a very near thing. Phew!"

It was past eleven o'clock when Crump, properly shod and the now superfluous pair of woollen socks tucked away into a pocket, admitted himself into Woodbine Cottage.

"Quite an escapade," he muttered with a chuckle. "And I must confess that I have enjoyed the excitement of it. And I'm proud, very proud of that young rascal Fred. I am very hopeful about his future. I do so want to see that lad get, if not to the top, very near to the top of the tree in his profession!"

Then he wagged a finger at an imaginary occupant of a chair opposite him, and shook his head.

"I know, my dear fellow, that, at my time of life—over sixty—I ought to be ashamed of myself! I know that my conduct to-night may seem very reprehensible; but I must ask you to wait before blowing me up. I confess that I had hoped for a better result; but my effort has not been utterly fruitless!"

He pulled out his notes, and the letter purloined from the trunk's secret recess.

"I am a step nearer the solution of the tragic mystery of Warham reservoir. I am grieved to say that, with regard to the other matter, I stand where I stood before!"

He shook his head sorrowfully. What news would the morrow bring of Alec Scarsdale? His kindly heart ached for Esther. Then he lighted his pipe. He was not in the least degree anxious about Fred. He felt quite confident in that young man's ability to see things through to a successful conclusion. He opened the letter. In the right hand corner was an address and a date. The letter was nearly thirteen years old.

"I must endeavour to obtain possession of a copy of the certificate of the marriage of James Balder and Alice Vince, also as much information as possible about Signor Balderini, the parachutist. I am very lucky to have friends abroad as well as at home."

Crump in the days of active service had done a considerable amount of continental work. He had fetched his writing materials, and was engaged upon a lengthy letter, when someone tapped on the window.

"That rascal Fred!" chuckled the little man.

When admitted, the young constable was in uniform. His right hand was bound up.

"Fred, my lad," said Crump quickly, "I hadn't realised that you had to go on duty so soon. I wouldn't for worlds be the cause of taking you off your beat. Duty's duty, my lad! Off you get. I'll overtake you in a minute; but I can't bear to think of your being off your beat. It's my fault, I know; but off you get!"

The little man hustled him out; then, having hurriedly locked up his papers, started out after him.

"Now, Fred," he said, having overtaken him, "you and I can talk, and at the same time it won't be interfering with your duty. Ah, my lad, you mustn't think me an old fidget, will you. But I remember a case of murder. If the constable hadn't been off his beat, murder would not have been done. I'm not blaming you, I am the cause. And now let me tell you that I am very pleased indeed with your conduct and presence of mind. Tell me what happened after my hurried exit?"

The young constable's story was quickly told. Railton, believing it to be the burglar upon him, had, for some time, continued to bite, kick, and howl for mercy simultaneously, and Fred had been in no hurry to undeceive him. Then at last he had been made to realise. Fred had explained that a blow below the belt had incapacitated him; that he had obtained a glimpse of the burglar before the light was extinguished—a hulking, murderous-looking fellow!

At that Crump chuckled.

"But," continued Fred, "though he was in one of the bluest funks, when I suggested that I ought to report at the station, he didn't fall in with the idea at all. Seemed to think it was too late; that no good would come of doing so."

"Exactly!" said Crump. "I can quite understand that."

"He implored me to search the place thoroughly, which I did. He seemed much relieved to find nothing missing. When I left him, he was still in a blue funk, hugging a revolver that he had unearthed from his bedroom. He begged me to keep quiet on the subject. I suppose one of the reasons being that he doesn't want the story of his little supper party to reach his master's ears."

When, on the following morning, Mrs. Cobb, shortly after six o'clock, entered Mr. Penworthy's room, she was surprised to find the little man busily engaged in writing letters.

"Gracious me, Mr. Penworthy," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me that you've not been to bed!"

"Well, yes, Mrs. Cobb. I had a tremendous amount of correspondence to get through, and I am anxious to get it off by the first post."

The stack of letters beside him gave evidence of a busy night. He himself was looking a little heavy-eyed.

"Then let me get you a cup of tea, Mr. Penworthy!"

"That, Mrs. Cobb, would be most refreshing."

When later Crump returned from posting his correspondence, a number of letters were awaiting him. He sorted through them quickly, and selected one addressed in Esther's handwriting. He began to read; then gave a little start. His face lit up with a radiant beam. It was the letter Esther

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A Society Lady on Society Ladies and Corpulency.

"*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*," according to the well-known French saying, and if we may judge from the following statements of Lady Violet Greville in a recent number of *The Graphic*, verily "suffering to be beautiful" seems to be the order of the day amongst our pretty society women. This charming critic of her sex writes:

"The discomfort and severe self-restraint practised in diet by smart society women, who take a pride in their figures, would astonish those people who regard them as living a life of ease and luxury. They rise early, they take a breakfast of certain biscuits and hot water, they dine on meat and vegetables, of which onions form a prominent feature, they deny themselves tea, sugar, and spice, and all things nice, take no drink with their meals, eschew wine, and practise tiresome and fatiguing exercises twice daily. This is the regimen of an acrobat or an ascetic, yet it is cheerfully undertaken by pretty, young and happy women. Soon there will be no need of cooks."

Whether the cook is so soon likely to vanish into the *ewigkeit* we do not know; but of this we are fully assured, that all the distressing and disagreeable restrictions and the "tiresome and fatiguing exercises" are quite unnecessary, even when symptoms of obesity become more than usually alarming. A carefully considered dietary and a reasonable amount of healthy and enjoyable outdoor exercise are in all cases excellent; but to carry the regimen to the extremes described by Lady Violet Greville is not only absurd, but detrimental to health.

Amongst all the systems of reducing the body to normal proportions and keeping it in a perfect condition of beauty and symmetry, what is now widely known as the

"RUSSELL" TREATMENT FOR THE CURE OF CORPULENCY

stands supreme, not only on account of the *permanency* of its results, but because it involves no unreasonable restrictions whatever, no violent exercise, no weakening carminatives, and, moreover, the liquid compound which is, so to speak, the keynote of the treatment, is so pleasant to the palate that even a child might take it without a grimace. The "Russell" treatment does not interfere in the slightest degree with the ordinary avocations and pleasures of life, and where ordinary sanitary and hygienic conditions are observed, it cannot be otherwise than eminently beneficial.

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FOR FURTHER DETAILS

of the famous "Russell" regimen we must refer our stout readers to the fountain head, viz., to the originator of the system, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, who has devoted the best years of a long life to the study of the causes and the cure of corpulency. Mr. Russell is the author of the book "Corpulency and the Cure," of which our readers have doubtless heard. His lucid and authoritative treatise of 256 pages is already in its eighteenth edition. It contains most exhaustive information on the subject under discussion, and must be of immense service to persons of both sexes who, to quote Lady Violet Greville, "take a pride in their figures." The recipe of the principal compound employed by Mr. Russell is given in order chiefly to show the harmless character of its ingredients, which are purely vegetable, without the admixture of any deleterious substance.

To obtain a *gratis* copy of "Corpulency and the Cure," you have but to enclose three penny stamps (for private postage) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., and you will receive a copy by return. We would especially point out the large number of extracts from laudatory letters received by the author from ladies and gentlemen who have had cause to be thankful for the *permanent* result of "doing Russell."

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OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

Our Powerful Serial.

had written after her return from Gurlston Pier and her glimpse of Alec Scarsdale.

"Ah!" ejaculated the little man, "a very great load has been lifted off my soul!"

He rubbed his hands together, and smiled gleefully.

"But what an extraordinary coincidence!"—then his face assumed a grave look—"but if by any chance he should encounter Mr. Seaton Revelle it might be very serious indeed! Miss Mansfield, in her note, does not say whether Mr. Scarsdale recognised her. If he did, I'm afraid from what I know of human nature that he will throw caution to the winds, and endeavour to see her, and that will mean recapture. I must write to her at once. Scarsdale's chance of keeping his freedom is to get abroad at once! But, in any case, a great load has been lifted from my soul! And though it would be heartrending should he be retaken and go back to prison, it might not be for such a very long period after all. He is alive, that's the great thing!"

ALONG THE CLIFFS TOWARDS THE CAVES!"

The investigations of the police had thrown no light on the identity of the mysterious man who had entered the drawing-room of Gurlston Hall. The servants had been severely cross-examined; but one and all had stoutly denied having left their rooms, and it was impossible to prove otherwise, whatever suspicions might be afloat. When the household had been alarmed, John Mansfield had been one of the last to be awakened. He had at once sought his daughter's room, to find Esther in bed. He had not dreamt of questioning her; but, having told her what had happened, had remained with her. But after a while, when she had assured him that she was not frightened, he had left her to join the men and Miss Bullivant in the smoking-room. Seaton Revelle, lying on the couch, Miss Bullivant close to him, had inquired after Miss Mansfield, expressing the hope that she had not been unduly alarmed. The banker had remarked proudly his daughter was exceptionally plucky, and that he had just left her. When Esther had appeared at breakfast, the police investigations were over, and Revelle had been driven over to his friend's place. One thought only was in her mind. Alec had not been recognised. So far he had evaded recapture. And she thanked God for this! The horribly compromising position in which she had been placed on the previous night was only brought home to her when, after breakfast, she met Gerald Phipps on the lawn. A flush brightened her white face. The young 'Varsity man looked painfully embarrassed. Nobody was near them.

"I want to thank you," said Esther in a low, tremulous voice, "for sparing me!"

He looked more embarrassed than before. For the life of him he could not think of anything to say.

"And," went on Esther, "think what you will of me; but you won't—won't forget your promise, will you?"

He found his tongue at last.

"Look here," he stammered, "I'm not—I don't want to think anything. I should not think of—giving you away!"—he used the expression for the want of a better one—"I have a sort of an idea that—well—that, don't you know, there was more in it than met the eye—and if you cared to trust me—won't you?"

Esther knew him to be a gentleman. Her instincts served her in good stead. She acted on the impulse of the moment.

"Yes," she whispered, "I feel that I can trust you. And I feel if I tell you, you won't regret having done what you did. In screening me, you screened an innocent man. It was the man whom I am engaged to marry whom I met last night!"

So it had been the convict fellow, after all!

"I say, look here! I don't want to know any more! You're a most awfully plucky, brave sort! If at the time I—well—I thought things, I ask your pardon now a hundred times. Will you—er—shake hands?"

Esther took his outstretched hand. The flush had deepened on her face. Stammering, halting, and incoherent his speech might have been, but it had been genuine.

"Thank you!" she whispered simply.

"And look here, don't you know, if in any way I could help you, please say so. I should be awfully glad to, if I could in any way, I mean to say that the fellow who, with chains on his legs, could go to the rescue of a drowning man, must have an awful lot of good in him!"

It was very bluntly put; but the words came straight from the heart—a gentleman's heart. Further conversation was put an end to by the appearance of others on the lawn. The mystery of the night before was for some little time the chief topic of conversation; then plans for the day were discussed. It was finally decided upon to make an excursion to Reefe Castle—a fine old ruin some distance inland. Mr. Mansfield asked to be excused. The morning post had brought him in a budget of business letters that required immediate attention.

"But you'll go, Esther. I'm afraid that I've got a morning's work before me."

"I'd rather not, father; I don't feel quite up to a long day yet. I think I'll stay here. Perhaps we can go somewhere together this afternoon."

"Mansfield," said Mr. Walters, "there's a thick sea-mist rolling up the channel at present; but if it clears by this afternoon, make use of the yacht, if you feel so inclined!"

Immediately overhead the sky was a cloudless blue, giving no indication of the low-lying mist that veiled the sea, and was slowly rising, presently to mount the crest of the cliffs and creep inland.

After the others had gone, and her father had retired into the house, Esther sat in a deck chair on the lawn, her shapely head bent forward, her eyes shaded by a hand. Where was he now? For a long while she did not stir; then a feeling of restlessness came over her. She rose up and made her way into the library where her father was busy with his correspondence.

"Father, I think I shall go for a little stroll."

"Very well, my dear child. Which way are you going? I might take a break presently, and come along to meet you."

"Along the cliffs towards the caves, though I don't suppose I shall get as far as the caves."

"Be careful, Esther—not too near the edge!"

She stooped down and kissed him on his forehead.

"You're such an anxious old daddy," she said, with a little smile, "where I am concerned!"

A few moments later Esther was ascending the steep road that only the night before Alec Scarsdale had traversed. When she reached the crest of the cliff she glanced down at the mist that, like a great grey cloud, veiled the sea from her. The distant hootings of steamers reached her, now and again the dull boom of the lighthouse gun, yet overhead the sky was cloudlessly blue. But the breeze was blowing from off the sea. She did not take the road, but moved pensively along the foot-path, marked at intervals by white stones, that ran parallel with the edge of the cliff.

For some time the banker continued to wrestle with his correspondence; then he leant back in his chair with a sigh.

"He's a charming fellow, well-connected, and a man of means. I do hope that in the fulness of time that it will come about!"

He was thinking of the possiblities of Seaton Revelle becoming his son-in-law. He put away his papers.

"Yes, I think I'll go and look for Esther now."

He was crossing the lawn when he caught sight of a figure, walking with a stick, limping up the drive. The man uppermost in his mind!

"Hullo, Revelle!" he cried, "this is better. I was afraid

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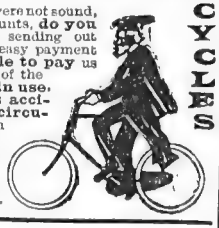

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that you would have to give that ankle of yours complete rest for two or three days."

"No, it's not sprained as I thought—only a bit of a twist or a rick or something. I can hobble along quite famously with the aid of a stick. Where's everybody gone to?"

"Gone over to Reefe Castle, all except Esther and myself,"

"And where—er—is Miss Mansfield?"

"Gone along the cliffs towards the caves."

"'Pon my soul!" said Revelle, with a little laugh, "I believe that I'm capable of hobbling as far as that."

John Mansfield changed his mind about going to meet Esther. Under the circumstances he preferred not to make a third party.

"Well, I shall be seeing you again before very long."

Revelle waved his hand, and started to limp back along the drive.

His destination was along the cliffs towards the caves!

'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH.

For all the hardness of his bed of rock and sand, Alec Scarsdale slept long and heavily. When at last he opened his eyes, a faint light filled the cave wherein he lay. At first, when the rugged outlines of the cave shaped themselves before his eyes, he fancied that he must be lying in the quarry at Greystone Prison. It was the sound of breaking waves that helped to bring back everything to his mind.

He passed out on to the ledge. It was a dull, grey morning. A mist fringed the horizon; but immediately about him the atmosphere was clear. He stood, drawing in deep breaths of the invigorating air, and taking stock of the wild, romantic surroundings. The ledge upon which he was standing, with its precipitous, burrowed background, was bay-shaped, inclosed at each end by towering white cliffs, their bases set in deep water. Atop the cliff to his left, the brow of which was overhanging, stood a withered, barren-looking tree. Beyond this, invisible to him, ran the footpath, set with stones, that led to the tunnel-like mouth that gave access to the caves.

He had no idea what the time was. He felt the better for his long sleep, refreshed by the invigorating air. He made a meal off the bread and meat supplied him by the kindly-hearted skipper, washed down by some fresh water that trickled from a crevice in the rocks. He thanked Heaven for the kindly forethought that had supplied him with pipe and tobacco. He sat himself down in the shadow of a great boulder to smoke, to think. What had happened after his flight? Had Esther been discovered? The thought made him writhe. He bitterly accused himself of selfishness. He had brought so much misery into her life. He stared mechanically at the horizon. The sea-mist was rolling nearer. Those moments with Esther had been so cruelly brief. If only he could see her again. He told himself that it was selfish; but he could not master his hunger.

He was still wrestling with his thoughts, when the mist crept up over the ledge, stealing round him insidiously like a damp shroud, and went onward and upward, topping the brow of the cliff and creeping away inland. The distant hoots of steamers mingled with the screechings of the circling gulls. Then the lighthouse gun boomed out heavily. To Scarsdale the mist seemed like the physical embodiment of the gloom that was stealing over his soul as he tried to solve the problem of the future. He must be going, somewhere—God alone knew how it was all going to end. If only he could see Esther once again!

"Help!"

He sprang to his feet.

It was a scream—a woman's scream, coming from out the mist, from somewhere above!

"Help!"

From somewhere above, but the baffling mist distorted sound. He glanced wildly up and round. As he did so, the mist lifted from the top of the cliffs.

"Oh, my God!" he breathed out sharply

Below the brow of the cliff away to his left, a woman was clinging to what seemed the white sheer side. Her feet were on a narrow, crumbling ledge, all that was between her and the water, more than a hundred feet below!

It was horrible! It seemed as though every moment she must fall. So narrow was the ledge, there was no room to turn upon it. She looked as though she were nailed to the side. And even as Scarsdale, horror-stricken, stared, a fragment broke away from the ledge, and crashed down. A moment later, and he was speeding like the wind. To reach the cliff above he had to ascend the tunnel leading up from the ledge. Once through, he darted to the edge of the cliff, went down on his hands and knees, peered over. The mist was rolling away inland. All was clear around, above, below!

Oh, God! His brain reeled.

For the grey, terrified, appealing face staring up at him, was that of the woman he loved!

Esther!

A deathly feeling of sickness swept over him, an icy hand seemed to have gripped on his heart. He saw her eyes dilate with a look that told of recognition—of hope.

"For God's sake, hold on!" he breathed out.

He dug his toes into the turf, stretched down his hand. Esther relaxed her hold with one hand, stretched up. There was a gap of two feet or more between the two hands. A fragment broke away from the ledge and crashed down. There would be no room for him upon the ledge below, if it bore the strain of the extra weight. If there had been room, and it had borne him, he could not have raised her into safety. the distance was too great.

"Oh, God! For a rope, a rope!"

And those mute, staring eyes were bent upon him, beseeching him to save her!

A rope! Oh, for a rope!

He thought of his coat. It would reach her; but without support he could not drag her up. There was nothing to give him a grip, a hold. The tree that stood behind him was too far away.

He cast a wild, despairing glance behind him. Some forty yards away stood a small barn. Outside, a horseless cart, a load of hay upon it. A thought flashed through his brain.

"Esther," he whispered down, "hold on, for the love of God, hold on a little longer! Can you, beloved, can you?"

Oh, the agony of it all—the life-and-death agony!

"Yes—but—only—a—little longer!"

"I'm coming back to you!"

He sprang to his feet; then raced like a madman to the cart. Yes, a rope was there, bound round the load of hay.

He tore at the knots. Heaven, for a knife! Then he used his teeth. At last. Only a few seconds in reality; but it had seemed to him an eternity of fiendish torture.

"Courage, beloved! I've got a rope. Just a little longer!"

It was a long, stout rope.

He lowered down one end.

"Make it fast round your waist!" he hissed.

With one hand she gripped it, wound it round her waist, knotted it. He darted back, wound the rope round the tree. There was yet plenty to spare. He made the end fast round his own waist. He had support now.

* * * * * * *

"Thank goodness, that confounded fog has passed over," muttered Seaton Revelle, as he rose up from one of the white stones beside the foot-path on which he had been sitting, "you don't catch me doing any walking near the edge of a cliff when there's a fog about—far too risky!"

He started to hobble forward again. Then suddenly——

"Good God!"

(To be continued.)

Splendid Serial Story Coming.

We have arranged for a magnificent serial story to follow the present one. The first instalment will appear in a few weeks.

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

A LETTER FROM RUSSIA.

I have received a letter in German from a correspondent in Russia. Let me say it is no small pleasure to me to know that evidently Short Stories is read in the land of the Tsars. My correspondent is anonymous, and asks me if I could help him to find a wife. He is thirty, of good character and means, possessing some property. He is musical, good looking, fond of sport, but does not care for the girls of his own country. If he could meet a pretty foreign lady who spoke French, and could play and sing, he would be happy. Can I help him?

NOT A MATRIMONIAL AGENCY.

I should be most happy. But I fear such girls as my Russian friend seeks would readily enough find suitors of their own nationality. I cannot undertake to help him in finding a wife, as I would not like to be in any way responsible for sending an English girl to live in so uncongenial a country as Russia, unless there were a very strong love motive in the case. However, I place his statement on record.

I AM WILLING TO HELP.

While I cannot agree to be the medium for exchanging names and addresses, if any lady correspondent would willingly undertake such a mysterious alliance, it would be interesting to know it. If there are English girls so inclined, I shall be happy to make a statement to that effect in a week or so, when my Russian friend may think it worth his while to endeavour to find an English wife through mutual friends, or, if he can afford it, a visit to this country.

SAME QUESTIONS ASKED.

"F. K. B."—You will see that I answered a very similar question to your own last week, and the advice then given may absolutely apply in your own case. I hope that other correspondents who do not see answers to their own inquiries in this column will take it that the same ground has been covered in an answer to some other inquirer. The reason is, of course, that among my hundreds of clients, very many of them ask me practically the same questions.

A TYPINE'S DIFFICULTY.

"In Despair" is a typine, and for some time received the attentions of her employer. After a while she learnt that he was married, but was already herself in love with him, and continues to be in spite of this knowledge. She does not believe he is very happy with his wife. The situation is a very good one, and she cannot afford to lose it.

KEEP STRICTLY TO BUSINESS RELATIONS.

"In Despair" is in a very difficult position. Let her keep her situation as long as possible, but let her relations with her employer never go beyond those of strict business. It will require a great deal of tact and strength of will, but only in this way will it be possible to save herself from ultimate trouble.

LEAVE YOUR SITUATION IF POSSIBLE.

At the same time, if she knows of another place, or could get one easily, it would be very advisable to take it. By admitting that she is in love with this married man, and that he is paying attentions to her, she enters upon very dangerous ground. It would be better to at once place herself out of the way of temptation, which may sooner or later befall, and perhaps ruin both of them.

THE WIFE'S SCHOOL FRIEND.

"H. G." has a wife who, nine months out of twelve, is all that he could desire. But at intervals she is visited by an old school friend, whom "H. G." does not at all like. When this young lady is there, all matrimonial bliss disappears, and "H. G." and his wife are continually quarrelling. If he stops the friend's visits his wife will make it an eternal grievance. How is "H. G." to arrange the matter?

HUSBAND'S FRIENDS ARE USEFUL.

Has not "H. G." himself got an old school friend he can run to earth and invite to his house? If he has, and can manage the necessary entertainment, the best thing he could do would be to invite him to stay whenever his wife's friend appears. An Englishman's house is his castle, and if "H. G.'s" wife requires a friend to visit her, surely her husband can claim the same privilege. Ask him next time, "H. G.," and if your wife gets unmanageable, try what spending a few nights at the theatre or elsewhere with him will do to bring her to a proper frame of mind. Husband's friends may be made enormously useful assets in "taming shrews" if properly employed.

GRETA AND THE GARDEN PARTY.

"Greta" was out at a garden party the other day, and spent rather a long time with a certain young man who, she tells me, interested her. Later on, it appeared that her mother had been watching her, and she was subjected to a severe scolding, because it was "very improper for a girl to be seen so long in the company of a young man." Do I think "Greta" was really doing wrong, and if not, how can I advise her to defend herself against such troubles with her parent?

CONVENTIONALITY IS NECESSARY.

I sympathise very much with "Greta." It is not at all unnatural that if a young man's conversation proved interesting she should wish to prolong it as long as possible. At the same time "Greta," with the rest of our sex, is compelled to bow to little conventionalities. Nothing has given me more annoyance often than to have had to suddenly break off an interesting conversation because by doing so I was acting in a selfish way. "Greta" was invited to a party, and as she was the guest of another, obviously it was her duty to make herself as generally amiable to everybody as it is possible to be.

WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE.

I should, had I been "Greta," have contrived to enjoy instead of one prolonged and noticeable conversation, several little ones. After, say, five minutes' chat with the young man, she could leave him for awhile on the understanding that they would see each other later on, and that she could have made as soon as possible, repeating the meetings at intervals. There is a gentle art of mild flirtation which has a very difficult technique, and is not easily acquired. But let "Greta" always remember that whatever her own inclinations may be, when she is another's guest, politeness must always be the first consideration.

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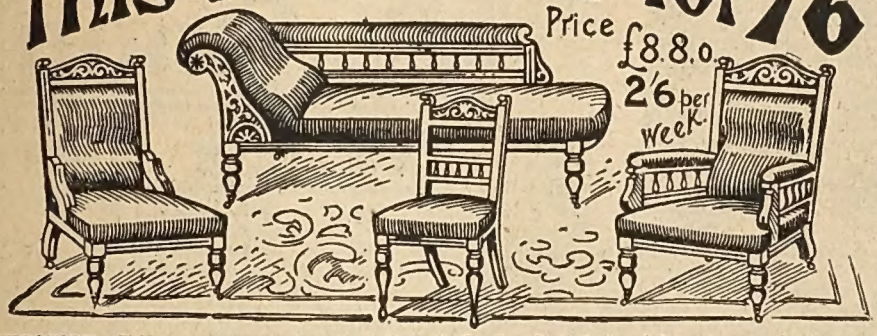

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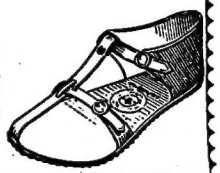

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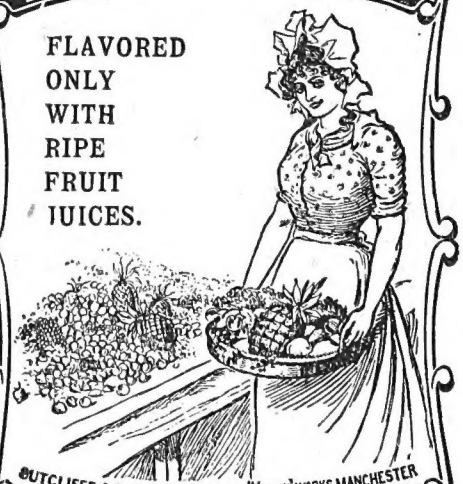

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